

***Kierkegaard's Contribution to the Philosophy of  
History.***

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the  
University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy**

**By Georgios Patios**

**July 2012**

## **Brief abstract**

Kierkegaard is well known as a witty writer mainly occupied with Christianity. In this thesis however, Kierkegaard is depicted as a philosopher who can provide us with some new and authentic ideas about the nature of history. Kierkegaard's approach to the problem of history is compared with Hegel's philosophy of history and Heidegger's view of history.

Hegel's philosophy of history is examined and analysed first and the conclusion is that we can clearly detect two main Hegelian assertions regarding history: first that reason is the main historical agent and second that human beings can fully know their past history.

Kierkegaard's arguments follow a totally different approach from that of Hegel's. Kierkegaard argues that we cannot fully know our past history and that the crucial element in history is to decide about our future history instead of simply trying to understand our past history. It is also argued that Kierkegaard constructs human self in such a way that human beings must simultaneously create themselves and history by making decisions regarding their present and their future.

It is further argued that neither Hegel nor Kierkegaard can, on their own, provide us with a total and full picture of the nature of history because Hegel on the one hand, focuses on the macroscopic view of history and Kierkegaard on the other, on the microscopic view (that is, from the point of view of the individual). This is why a possible synthesis of both views is suggested as a better way to truly understand history.

Heidegger's view of history is examined as a possible 'existential' alternative approach to history from that of Kierkegaard's. The conclusion is that Heidegger cannot really offer us any help because he is either borrowing his main concepts from Kierkegaard or he is too vague.

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## List of abbreviations of the main texts used

<i>BT</i>	Being and Time
<i>CA</i>	The Concept of Anxiety
<i>CT</i>	The Concept of Time
<i>CUP</i>	Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments
<i>IPH</i>	Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History
<i>JC</i>	Johannes Climacus
<i>PF</i>	Philosophical Fragments
<i>PH</i>	The Philosophy of History
<i>PR</i>	Philosophy of Right
<i>PS</i>	Phenomenology of Spirit
<i>SUD</i>	The Sickness unto Death

## INTRODUCTION

My thesis is to present Kierkegaard's contribution to the philosophy of history. I argue that Kierkegaard redirects history from its epistemological orientation towards human responsibility (and capacity) to take decisions about the future. Kierkegaard can help us understand history not as an effort to know our past but as a turn towards future orientation and praxis orientation, even ethical orientation; and this is something that history (and the philosophies of history) has neglected.

The philosophical effort to extract a unified theory regarding Kierkegaard's philosophy of history from Kierkegaard's different texts runs contrary to the so called issue of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. That is, Kierkegaard wrote his texts under different pseudonyms. It can be argued thus that, for example, what Climacus states in *Philosophical Fragments* belongs to a different context from what Vigilius Haufniensis states in *Concept of Anxiety* and so on regarding all the different pseudonyms Kierkegaard uses in his texts. If this is true, then we cannot even try to examine Kierkegaard's texts for any Kierkegaardian theory because every text would have a different context and a different philosophical point of reference. Kierkegaard as a thinker would vanish in the multitude of his personae. My thesis is that, no matter how many literary disguises Kierkegaard uses, the voice that animates them is one and only one: Kierkegaard's own authentic voice. I argue that it is more productive to focus our attention to the ideas and the arguments we can find in Kierkegaard's texts regarding the nature of history instead of viewing

Kierkegaard's authorship as a scattering image of many different literary personae. In this way, we can approach Kierkegaard's texts purely from the point of view of the ideas and the argumentation that they can provide us.

What I intend to provide in this thesis is an interpretation of history derived from some Kierkegaardian concepts, rather than the definitive statement of Kierkegaard's own 'theory of history'. This is why whenever I refer to Kierkegaard's approach to history I use the terms 'Kierkegaard's concept of history' instead of 'Kierkegaard's philosophy of history'. Kierkegaard's main concern is to provoke his readers and engage them in an inner self-exploration. History interests Kierkegaard only in terms of pointing out the absolute interrelation between historical and human existence; having said that however, I will argue that Kierkegaard can provide us with unique, original and useful philosophical answers to the problem of history.

In my analysis of Kierkegaard's approach to history I will mainly use the 'Interlude' from the *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Johannes Climacus* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. As I will explain in my second and third chapter I consider the 'Interlude' to contain the main Kierkegaardian approach to the problem of freedom in history. The texts *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*, I will argue, can provide us with the main characteristics which, according to Kierkegaard, constitute the historical core of the human 'self'. *Johannes Climacus* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* will be used as a broader conceptual context to the 'Interlude'.



History is usually defined in two ways, namely: a) as events which have occurred, as things that have already happened and b) as the human account of these events.<sup>1</sup> History thus is usually directed towards the past and is (usually) oriented towards an epistemological apprehension of this past. What signifies then the nature of history is on the one hand the past and on the other hand our effort to know this past.

We have many different approaches to the problem of history.<sup>2</sup> What all these approaches have in common is that they view history under the need to know something that has happened. Even those philosophies (like Ricoeur's<sup>3</sup> and Gadamer's<sup>4</sup> hermeneutics) which argue that history in fact is something that takes place in the present do not stay away from the epistemological view of history; even those efforts (like White's<sup>5</sup> and Barthes'<sup>6</sup> narrativism) which are focusing on matters of interpretation instead of knowledge, do not see history as future. History's 'futurity' and history as a human moral activity however play the crucial role in Kierkegaard's approach to history.

It is essential, before starting to analyse and argue in this thesis about Kierkegaard's concept of history, to clarify my initial presuppositions

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. xii and Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd, 1961), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> For a general introduction to the different philosophies of history we have see: *Philosophies of History From Enlightenment to Postmodernity*, introduced and edited by Robert M. Burns and Hugh Rayment-Pichard, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, introduced and edited by Hans Meyerhoff, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1959), Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History an Introduction*, (New York: Continuum, 2008), and *Philosophical Analysis and History*, edited by William H. Dray, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> See: Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, translated by John B. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated and edited by David E. Linge, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, Ltd, 1976)

<sup>5</sup> See: Hayden White, *Tropics of History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> See: Roland Barthes, 'Historical Discourse', in *Introduction to Structuralism*, edited by M. Lane, (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

concerning what an adequate account of history should look like. As I intend to depict in my fourth chapter, any given theoretical account of history should be able to provide us with adequate answers to two major questions, namely: a) what is the relation of history and time and b) who is the main historical agent. I distinguish these particular questions because: a) time, on the one hand, seems always to interweave with history (any kind of history) and b) on the other hand, the question of who makes history is the question that every philosophy of history tries to answer. I will try thus to find out the possible answers that Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger can give to these two questions.

Kierkegaard's approach to history thus can be beneficial because: a) Kierkegaard is a particularly helpful figure for effecting a reorientation and b) this reorientation from knowing the past towards creating the future can reveal new and crucial elements of history and the historical. Kierkegaard then, if nothing else, can be used as an interesting (and philosophically profitable) occasion for history to start being understood in terms of future ethical praxis instead of being understood as knowledge of the past.

Hegel is one of the first philosophers to make history central to the philosophical enterprise. For Hegel history can (and should) be understood in terms of human (philosophical) effort to understand and know what happened, the past. Hegel thus can be used as an example or illustration of a tendency within philosophy of history that focuses on the knowledge of the past.

I consider Hegel to remain the paradigmatic philosopher of the large-scale 'macrocosmic' view of history. My reasons for this are very simple but, I hope, also very obvious and persuasive: a) in our modern western philosophical

tradition, Hegel's philosophy of history is the first philosophical effort to explain history in terms of a large-scale and macrocosmic view of history. This means that every philosopher of history that comes after Hegel cannot avoid 'dealing' with his philosophy of history simply because it is already there. It is the same that happens with poetry and Homer. Homer was the first person, in our modern western tradition, who wrote poetry and thus every poet after him must contrast his poetry with Homers, even if he knows nothing of Homer. Hegel like Homer was the first and that cannot be overlooked. b) Hegel's analysis of history as something that must be understood as the product of reason through the actions of whole nations and states instead of viewing history as the sum of arbitrary actions of persons and his argumentation regarding the teleological nature of history remain the main historical arguments that every philosopher of history must accept or argue against if he aspires to provide us with his 'macrocosmic' view of history. Marx, for example, although he strongly disagrees with Hegel's explanation of history, finds it necessary to engage himself with Hegel's philosophy of history.

I choose Hegel because we cannot overlook either his primacy in terms of being the first who creates a whole new philosophical current in the philosophy of history or his tremendous influence on the philosophers of history who came after him.

Hegel (as a philosopher of history) becomes the necessary interlocutor of anyone who aspires to say something about history. For those who come after him, Hegel becomes the necessary point of reference. For those who were before him, Hegel becomes the main criterion. Even those who are trying to critique him have to recognise Hegel's major contribution to the shape of our

understanding of what history is. For Hegel truth becomes the ultimate search in history and this truth is always: 'what happened in the past and why'.<sup>7</sup>

The main philosophies of history that try to distance themselves from Hegel's philosophy of history are 'narrativism' and 'hermeneutics'. Narrativism argues that we cannot know what exactly happened and that we should focus on what has been written (about what happened). Narrativism however is still directed towards an epistemological view of history. To 'know' how and why a certain history has been written in a certain way remains the main historical attitude. Hermeneutics argue that history has to do more about our present situation and less about the past. Hermeneutics however try to 'know' history, even from the standpoint of the present. Hegel then, even as a philosophical opponent, remains at the centre of the ongoing philosophical discussion in regard with the nature of history. Furthermore, it seems that, even these philosophies of history that try to oppose Hegel, share some common traits with his approach to history; narrativism shares the focus in the past and hermeneutics share the focus in the effort to 'understand' history (although from the standpoint of the present and not of the past).

In the chapter one I will analyse Hegel's philosophy of history. I will argue that Hegel makes two specific claims about history: a) a metaphysical one that reason rules in history and b) an epistemological one that we, human beings, can fully know our history (as past).

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<sup>7</sup> Historical reasoning then, for Hegel, becomes the effort to know the 'what' and the 'why' of the past history. Mark Day directly connects historical reasoning with knowledge and past: 'Historical reasoning is the way it is because of material relations between the past and present. Those relations underpin the point of historical reasoning: to arrive at truths about the past.' Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History, An Introduction*, (London, New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 25.

In order to demonstrate how bringing in Kierkegaard would be beneficial to philosophy of history, we need to get to grips with his own approach to history. In chapter two I will analyse how Kierkegaard argues against the necessity to know our past history and how he points out our freedom (and responsibility) to decide about our future history.

In chapter three I will present how Kierkegaard constructs human self as the only historical agent. I will argue that Kierkegaard considers history as being always oriented towards future and that he considers human freedom as the only creative historical force.

In chapter four I will compare Hegel's approach to that of Kierkegaard's. I will try to point out why both approaches fail to give us a whole and satisfactory view of history and accordingly I will demonstrate how a synthesis of both views can give us a better grasp of the nature of history.

In chapter five I will analyse Heidegger's approach to history. I will do so because there is a possible objection to what has gone before. One might agree that philosophy of history needs an 'existential' supplement, but disagree that it is Kierkegaard who can provide it. The other main existentialist contender who could make a substantial contribution to the philosophy of history is Heidegger. However, this chapter will demonstrate that insofar as Heidegger's philosophy of history is significant, it is almost completely derivative of Kierkegaard's; and insofar as it goes beyond Kierkegaard, it is philosophically vague.

In my conclusion I will suggest that Kierkegaard's approach to history and the historical is: a) an important and original contribution to philosophy of history and b) significant for the contemporary practice of philosophy of history.

## Chapter One

### HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

#### Introduction

To begin it is worth considering a paradigmatic version of what philosophy of history looks like when it is too objective or, to put it in other words, when it considers the nature of history as something which is only an object of our understanding and our knowledge without acknowledging the importance of individual existence in shaping of the historical phenomenon.

Hegel's philosophy of history depicts history as the product of Spirit's self-realisation through reason.<sup>8</sup> Both 'Spirit' and 'reason' transcend human subjectivity. Hegel also claims that human subjects do not create history. History instead is created by organised communities like states and nations.

Hegel's philosophy of history thus is an 'objective' one in the sense that it does not consider human subjects to be the actual historical subjects. It is also 'objective' because Hegel claims that the only thing that human beings can succeed in their effort to realise and understand history is objective knowledge of their past history. This knowledge is 'objective' because, for Hegel, it can be validated without the interference of any individual (and thus subjective) interpretation. The meaning and the aim of history is always there for us to discover it and we can do so only if we follow Hegel's method.

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<sup>8</sup> Hegelian Spirit can be understood either as an absolute metaphysical entity that grounds and creates our reality or as something that arises from the collective activity of human beings but at the same time surpasses them. Hegelian Spirit however, as the main historical agent is always something that both grounds and surpasses individual historical activity. In this context, I interpret the Hegelian Spirit as the 'ultimate historical subject'. That is, I interpret it as an actual historical force which always is (ontologically) primary to human historical activity.

Historical research thus can arrive at an absolutely certain (and thus objective) knowledge of the 'what', the 'how' and the 'why' of our past history.

It is then quite obvious that Hegel in his philosophy of history tries to transcend human subjectivity in terms of: a) making history and b) knowing history. Hegel's philosophical effort then can be an excellent example of an 'objective' approach to history and the historical. In a way, we can claim that Hegel tries to create a subjectively undisputed method to know history in a similar manner our sciences (like physics and chemistry for example) try to acquire 'objective' knowledge, i.e. knowledge that does not depend on individual interpretations but depends instead on objective facts.

The purpose of this chapter will be to point out two basic Hegelian claims in regard with: a) who is the actual historical agent and b) which must be the actual object of our historical research. I will argue that Hegel makes a metaphysical claim that Spirit through reason and not human individuals creates history and an epistemological claim that we, human beings, can and should know our past history.

I will argue accordingly that the Hegelian philosophy of history fails to do justice to the subjective individual contribution to history and as such fails to provide us with a complete picture of the nature of history. I will try to indicate Hegel's lack of any interest in the idea that the individual human is a crucial historical agent.

My argument in this chapter runs as follows: a) Hegel understands history only as something which already is past (and thus for him completed), b) history for him can be approached only through our cognitive powers, and c) individual human beings are not important factors in the constitution of history;

Spirit<sup>9</sup> is the crucial historical agent and besides Spirit only nation-states can play any (important) role in history.

My method will consist of: a) a close examination of Hegel's original texts, focusing mainly on his *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (hereafter *IPH*),<sup>10</sup> but analysing also parts of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of the World History*,<sup>11</sup> his *Philosophy of Right*,<sup>12</sup> and his *Phenomenology of Spirit*,<sup>13</sup> b) an effort to define certain Hegelian terms such as 'Spirit', 'Reason', 'Understanding' in order to point out the exact philosophical argumentation of Hegel.

The chapter will be structured as follows:

- 1) A basic approach to Hegel's ambiguous use of 'reason' and 'rational'.

My point is that Hegel cannot be approached considering his philosophy of history without having first a definite grasp on some key concepts he uses, such as 'reason' and 'rationality'.

- 2) I will give a detailed analysis of what Hegel considers to be 'the wrong way to do history'. My point is that if we aspire to fully understanding his philosophy of history we must be aware of Hegel's criticism against other ways of doing history. What emerges from this discussion is the overarching motif that Hegel, even in his critiques of other positions, never concerns himself either with individual human beings as

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<sup>9</sup> *Geist* is the original Hegelian term. I will continue using the word 'Spirit' as the english translation of that term but I have here to acknowledge the possible problems regarding this translation, because *Geist* means also 'mind'.

<sup>10</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, translated from the German edition of Johannes Hoffmeister by H.B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree, (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), hereafter *PH*.

<sup>12</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, translated by Malcolm Knox, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), hereafter *PR*.

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), hereafter *PS*.



historical agents or with history as something other than a past to be known. In fact, I argue that Hegel chooses to be totally blind to such possibilities regarding the nature of history.

- 3) The idea of 'Reason in history' forms the heart of my argument and the most important aspect of my analysis. I will examine closely the Hegelian argumentation to this conclusion from *IPH* and I will argue that Hegel bases his whole philosophy of history on the particular way he chooses to interpret Incarnation. My claim is that both the metaphysical claim and the epistemological claim on which Hegelian philosophy of history is grounded (rehearsed above) are informed by this particular interpretation of reason in history.

### The Hegelian enigma

One is not able either to analyse or to comprehend Hegel's philosophy of history without first understanding his particular philosophical method as well as his philosophical aims in general. Only through acquaintance with the overall context of his philosophy can one do justice to his philosophy of history. To begin, therefore, I must provide the basic parameters of Hegel's philosophy in general.

Each philosopher presents a distinctive challenge to their reader; but if someone decides to read Hegel's philosophy he will find himself sorely challenged—not only owing to his notoriously obscure writing but far more significantly owing to the ambiguity of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John Watson refers to Hegel's 'impenetrability' and he tries to give us a general guide through Hegel's overall philosophy. He concludes that, for Hegel, we can grasp the real nature of the things through a systematic categorisation of man's intellectual actions because "all is rational". John Watson, 'The Problem of Hegel', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (Sep., 1894), pp. 546-567. Watson, however, fails to recognise that in the very heart of Hegel's 'impenetrability' lies Hegel's ambiguity and thus every effort to understand Hegel

Everybody, not only the philosopher, in her effort to understand both the external and her internal world, makes distinctions. Rational subjects customarily, separate the objects of knowledge from the subjects which know them. Hegel, however, argues for the coincidence of the subject of knowledge with its object. He believes that he has found a distinctive logic, 'reason' (*Vernunft*) which, instead of separating, always unifies.<sup>15</sup> Whenever, then, one tries to approach Hegel's philosophy through customary distinctions, one will fail to fully grasp Hegel's effort to surpass these very distinctions, and so one will end up viewing Hegel either from one side (the subjective) or the other (objective).<sup>16</sup>

One consequence of this refusal to distinguish the subjective from the objective is that there is no way to arrive at a univocal interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. To this extent, ambiguity stands at the very core of his philosophy. Hence, every possible interpretation of Hegel's philosophy is confronted with

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must acknowledge the fact that Hegel cannot be univocally defined without the risk of been misunderstood.

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent analysis of Hegelian dialectical logic in point of its relation with common (Aristotelian) logic see: The International Library of Critical Essays in the History of Philosophy, *Hegel*, vol.II, edited by David Lamb, Robert Hanna, 'From an Ontological Point of View: Hegel's Critique of the Common Logic', pp.137-170 and Katalin G. Havas, 'Dialectical Logics and their Relation to Philosophical Logics', pp.185-196, (London: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> The most characteristic term which can clearly depict this Hegelian attitude is 'mediation'. Hegel understands mediation as an active process rather than viewing it as a special kind of relation. To give an example, to say that England's population is larger than Scotland's population, is to depict a certain relation between England and Scotland. To argue however that a state as a whole consists at the same time of the total sum of its citizens and of every individual person that is a citizen of this state is to point to the state as the mediation of individuality and totality. In other words, Hegel argues that mediation can preserve within it the antitheses which it 'mediates'. This is, for Hegel, why we cannot argue that mediation is a synthesis. Synthesis, Hegel argues, depicts a certain relation between two or more things while mediation is an active process which while brings together different things is able nevertheless to provide us with a further development. To remain with the same example, a state is a mediation and not a synthesis of totality and individuality because both totality and individuality can really exist only within the state that 'mediates' them.

one almost insuperable problem: how can one transpose Hegel's unique terminology into common philosophical language?

It is, of course, natural for every thinker to adopt their own vocabulary, but Hegel initiates a different logic as well. How, then, are we to translate Hegel's logical conclusions into a logic that he considers to be inherently inferior? What is more, one always has to be aware of Hegel's mixing of philosophical and theological terms. In his *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* for example he uses 'reason', 'Idea' and 'God' as synonyms. Again, although it is not unnatural for a philosopher to appropriate the concept of 'God', Hegel tends to equate 'God' with 'reason' or with 'Idea' or with 'Absolute' without providing any explicit definition of any of these terms. Is 'God' to be understood in the same way as it is understood in every Western Christian community or, at least, in every Western Protestant community? If yes, how can we explain Hegel's idiosyncratic interpretation of the 'Incarnation'? Of course, this is only to hint a problematic character which besets every interpretation of Hegel's thought: it is not the purpose of this thesis to solve this problem; yet it needs to be borne in mind in what follows.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, there are not only many different interpretations of Hegel's philosophy, but many contradictory ones.<sup>18</sup> Some interpreters consider Hegel to be an exponent of 'panlogism' (because he believes that 'everything is rational'), others believe him to be the father of 'irrationalism' (because he uses a different kind of logic). Some define him as utterly religious and others

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<sup>17</sup> Later, I will attempt to spell out the significance of the Incarnation for Hegel's philosophy of history. At this stage, however, what is crucial is to underline the ambiguity of the Hegelian use of certain concepts, including the concept of God. See: J. A. Leighton, 'Hegel's Conception of God', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov., 1896), pp. 601-618.

<sup>18</sup> I will refer to the specific secondary bibliography when I will examine each particular view of Hegel.

as an atheist who transformed religious faith into a categorial system. Some view him as someone who reduces everything to one absolute principle and some as a 'historicist' (because he reduces everything to its historical situation).<sup>19</sup>

I think the reader has the idea by now. My way of approaching this fundamental ambiguity is to begin with Hegel's statement that 'What is rational is real; And what is real is rational.' (*PR*, 18). I do take him to be claiming that the very core of reality is rational and thus can only be essentially understood by reason.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In order to give a specific example of the above mentioned difficulty I adduce a rather long fragment of William Desmond's essay 'Thinking on the Double: The Equivocities of Dialectic.': 'The first opposition or doublet is: On the one hand, Hegel has been with Goethe against Newton, and for resorting to a priori reasoning accused of 'panlogism,' and on the other hand, of being the progenitor of 'irrationalism' in his successors. One views Hegel as marked by an excess of logic, the other by an excess of illogic, masquerading as logic...On the one hand, Hegel is excessively religious, to the point of 'mystifying' the processes of reality; on the other hand, he is an insidious 'atheist,' equivocally masking his godlessness in a categorial system that seems to sing a hymn to God....Here Hegel is seen, on the one hand, as supremely a foundationalist, insofar as all of being and thought seem to be reducible to one absolute principle, named the idea or Geist, or simply the absolute. On the other hand, Hegel is said to be an essentially historicist thinker who deconstructs the metaphysical appeal to eternal foundations. Hegel as foundationalist is the philosopher of absolute identity, Hegel as historicist/deconstructionist is the first philosopher of difference, as the high priest of deconstruction, Derrida himself, put it. Hegel is Hegel, but he is also other than Hegel; Hegel is the first post-Hegelian philosopher...In the first case, Hegel is accused of being an enemy of science, for criticizing empirical and mathematical science, siding in his philosophy of nature. Hegelian 'science' is only metaphoric imagination. In the second case, he is accused of lacking metaphoric imagination, of not being sensitive enough to art, proclaiming its end, of making excessive claims for his science of philosophy as putatively subordinating art and religious to its own absolute comprehension. He seems to be either too scientific or not scientific enough, too metaphorical or not metaphorical enough. He is too much of one or the other, or too little, or perhaps even not one or the other. What strange figure is this?' The International Library of Critical Essays in the History of Philosophy, *HEGEL*, vol.II, edited by David Lamb, 'Thinking on the Double: The Equivocities of Dialectic' by William Desmond, pp.225-226, (London: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Hegel himself gives this kind of explanation in the sixth paragraph of the Introduction of his *Logic*, in the *Being*, part one of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, (1830), translated by William Wallace.

The main problem with this Hegelian declaration is that it is so general and abstract that it becomes vague. The historical fact of the existence of two opposite to each other interpretations of Hegel's philosophy exactly after his death (with the so called right and left wing Hegelians) is enough to point out the problem. Hegel's rationalism, and the way we will choose to interpret it, grounds every possible effort to analyse and understand Hegel's philosophy in general and his philosophy of history in particular.

Hegel himself underlines this interpretation with the following remark:

The courage of truth, faith in the power of the spirit, is the first condition of philosophising. Because man is spirit he should and must deem himself worthy of the highest; he cannot think highly enough of the greatness and power of his spirit. For a man of this faith nothing is so inflexible and refractory as not to disclose itself to him. The originally hidden and reserved essence of the universe has no force which could withstand the courage of knowing; it must expose itself to that courage, bring its wealth and depths to light for our enjoyment. (IHP, 3).

It should be noted that in this passage Hegel speaks of 'the courage of truth', 'faith in the spirit' and 'enjoyment', whereas in *PS* Hegel speaks of the 'desire' of the consciousness to know the world and the other consciousnesses. It seems that either Hegel quite frequently uses metaphoric language or else he really does ascribe vital inclinations and impulses to our abstract logical capacities. This, of course, is one more example of Hegel's disregard for distinctions: he unifies passion and thinking and so transforming thinking into a vital, living force.

'The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development.' (*PS*, 11). Hegel rejects

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My point is that it is enough for us to understand Hegel's 'rationalism' as an epistemological belief regarding our ability to know the world. It goes without saying that the Hegelian rationalism can be a lot more than this, but it is my aim to point out that Hegel in his philosophy of history believes that we can know our history without having any kind of problems regarding the nature of our knowledge.

Morris R. Cohen offers us a general summary of the problems regarding Hegel's rationalism. He concludes by stating that: 'It must admit [rationalism] that rational order is only one phase of a world which always contains more than we can possibly explain.' Morris R. Cohen, 'Hegel's Rationalism', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (May, 1932), p. 301.

I argue that Hegel's basic flaw in his approach to the nature of history is exactly his belief that we can fully know history. And this flaw comes from Hegel's fundamental belief that our reality is (mainly and crucially) rational.

habitual distinctions; for him the truth is both inside us and out there, it can be grasped by us but only in its totality. My suggestion for a plausible reading of Hegel's thought is therefore the following: whenever we find philosophical characterizations of Hegel's philosophy we must extend them to totality to ensure they possess the absoluteness Hegel would require of them. Reason, for example, is not just a faculty; reason is the sum 'total' of human comprehension—and, indeed, sometimes reason is 'absolute' knowledge.

Hegel specifically ascribes to reason purposeful nature: 'What has just been said can also be expressed by saying that 'Reason is *purposive activity*.' (PS, 12, the italics are not mine). Reason is a living totality: living because it is an 'activity' and totality because it carries its own purpose within itself without needing to depend on anything else.

A further illustration of the difference between Hegelian terminology and other employments of the same terms is 'understanding'. Hegel characterises the understanding as follows:

To break an idea up into its original elements is to return to its moments, which at least do not have the form of the given idea, but rather constitute the immediate property of the self. This analysis, to be sure, only arrives at *thoughts* which are themselves familiar, fixed, and inert determinations. But what is thus *separated* and non-actual is an essential moment; for it is only because the concrete does divide itself, and make itself into something non-actual, that is self-moving. The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the *Understanding*, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power. The circle that remains

self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it. (PS, 18-19)

Understanding separates in order to 'understand', to comprehend. It is powerful but it is not 'real'. What is 'real' and concrete is the union or rather the active unification of these elements that have been separated by the understanding. Such unification is the product of reason. It might be true that in this way understanding is more 'effective' than reason, but it is also 'non-actual', it is fixed. What is critical for our knowledge of reality is reason. In this way, understanding only provides a prelude to knowing. We cannot 'know' through our understanding because in life nothing is segregated; instead, everything is whole, everything lives through its totality. The *IPH* has the title 'Reason in History'. This reason has nothing to do with understanding, nothing to do with making distinctions. This reason is not merely a cognitive capacity. It is the core of reality itself. Reason unifies, gives meaning and most of all actualises our comprehension of the reality. It is in this way that Hegel not only tries to overcome the Kantian restrictions on knowledge, but tries also to sketch the very nature of reality and consequently the very nature of history.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth rehearsing one further problem when faced with Hegel's philosophy of history. Hegel gives his philosophical approach to history in

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<sup>21</sup> The importance of these preliminary clarifications regarding some of the most basic Hegelian terms lie not only in their elementary nature but also in their central position in the Hegelian philosophy of history. What Hegel means by writing 'reason', or 'understanding', or 'God', or 'spirit' in his philosophy of history is the necessary key for us to wholly understand his philosophy of history.

For a general discussion on the possible reasons that drove Hegel to have his particular philosophy of history see: Steven B. Smith, 'Hegel's Discovery of History', *The review of Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), pp. 163-187.

Smith however views Hegel's philosophy of history only from the point of view of politics and thus narrows his approach.

many different texts without earmarking any text in particular as definitive. Regardless of the systematic structure of the Hegelian philosophy in general, we must look in many different places to fully understand his philosophy of history.

What is more, Hegel never published any kind of philosophy of history. All we have are the notes that his students kept from his lectures and some personal notes he made for these lectures. In consequence, it must be borne in mind that the *Lectures on the Philosophy of the World History* and its *Introduction* are not something that Hegel prepared for publication.

We do have, however, Hegel's 'official' synopsis of his philosophy of history in the *Philosophy of Right*. At the end of the work, under the title 'World History', Hegel provides a definitive overview of his conception of history. It will thus form the touchstone for my interpretation.

### **The Varieties of Historical Writing**

To get to grips with Hegel's model of the correct way to know history, one first has to rule out the wrong way. And, indeed, Hegel himself begins by criticising other approaches to history in his discussion of 'varieties of historical writing'. My argument is that even here, when criticising other views, Hegel fails to view history as anything but a past to be grasped through our understanding and he cannot even acknowledge the possibility of individual human beings being the main agents of history. My main argument here is that Hegel is so blind to these possibilities that he cannot even criticise them.

Hegel does not write history or, more accurately, he is not a historian. Hegel is interested only in a 'philosophical history of the world' (*IPH*, 11). He thus concerns himself not with the usual modes of historical writing, but with what



he takes to be the fullest comprehension of world history, which he calls philosophical. He distinguishes it from two other modes of history, namely 'original history' and 'reflective history'. However, even in these two rejected forms of historiography, there is still no mention of individuals as historical agents or history as present or future or even history as moral choice.

Original history is simply the narration of the deeds of the heroes. Herodotus and Thucydides wrote this kind of history. 'Such historians transplant [the past] into a better and more exalted soil than the soil of transience in which it grew, into the realm of the departed but now immortal spirits (as the Ancients describe their Elysium), so that their heroes now perform for ever the deeds they performed but once while they lived.' (IPH, 12). The main purpose, then, of original history is the narration of deeds in order for them to be eternalized through such narration. There is no proper reflection upon these historical facts. 'His first concern, therefore, (of the historian) will not be to reflect upon his subject;' (IPH, 13). The historian and the historical facts that he describes are one. The author lives in the period he writes about and never tries to distance himself from his history. 'The writer, then, does not depict and interpret this (historical) consciousness by means of personal reflections; on the contrary, he must allow the individuals and nations themselves to express their aspirations and their awareness of what their aspirations are.' (IPH, 14). For Hegel 'original history' is the 'unreflected' narration of historical events, and its purpose is to preserve human activities that deserve to be preserved because of their 'heroism'.

Two conclusions emerge from this Hegelian critique of 'original' history: a) even in this history only 'heroes' and not every human being create history

and b) this history refers only to the past and is intended to be known. Historical record is the only possible approach to history.<sup>22</sup>

Hegel moves on to criticise 'reflective' history. Again, I want to show that Hegel here also considers that this 'wrong' approach to history is restricted to the past as an object of knowledge and understanding. History remains restricted to nations or states without attributing any historical agency to individuals.

Reflective history aspires to be something more than simple narration. Reflective history tries to analyse and explain the historical events that it is dealing with. The most important thing about it (the reflective history) is the way in which it treats the historical material. For the writer approaches it in his own spirit, which is different from the spirit of the object itself; everything therefore depends on the maxims, ideas, and principles which the author applies both to the content of his work (i.e. to the motives behind the actions and events he describes) and to the form of his narrative. (*IPH*, 16).

As this quotation makes clear, reflective history (besides being simply a narration) is now a means of thinking about this narration, and so the historical reflection itself becomes an active factor in this narration. In other words, the writer of reflective history does not constrain himself to merely recording of historical events but tries to 'understand' them. History is thus still only an

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<sup>22</sup> One can argue that this knowledge of the past is actually about the present or at least it is about the present age. Hegel's approach however, still is purely orientated towards the knowledge of the past. We, as people who are living today and yet we search to know our past history, cannot but view history as an epistemological research of past events.

object of our understanding, a matter of the right epistemological approach to the past.

For Hegel the danger of such an approach to history is obvious. Every writer imposes his own spirit on the historical period he examines. If it happens that the writer's country has not developed a historiological culture, then the historian will be forced to create their own individual theory of how history should be written, resorting to arbitrary and falsified conclusions. In this way Hegel judges that the German historians of his period produce history of a lower quality than their French and English counterparts, simply because Germany has not yet arrived at a mature historical culture.

There are four kinds of reflective history: a) general, b) pragmatic, c) critical and d) specialized history.<sup>23</sup> 'General history', as its name suggests, is history that provides a general survey of the history of a nation or a country or even of the whole world. Livy constitutes a fine example of such a historian. His history of Rome and the Roman people (*Ab Urbe Condita*) gives us the history of Rome and its people from before the foundation of the city through to the reign of Augustus in Livy's own time. Hegel complains about the 'lack of coherence and the inconsistency which often prevails in the main sequence of

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<sup>23</sup> George Dennis O'Brien makes an interesting point regarding Hegel's analysis of the varieties of historical writing: 'Hegel is universally regarded as a speculative philosopher of history, but it would seem that from the standpoint of his own system no such philosophical enterprise can be derived.' (O'Brien, 1971, p. 298). O'Brien however is not interested in pointing out any lack of 'existential aspects' in the Hegelian philosophy of history. My point however, is that we need to be fully aware of the Hegelian criticism against these varieties, not only because (as O'Brien underlines) at the end it could appear that Hegel's own philosophy of history makes the same mistakes as the 'reflective history', but also because Hegel even in his negative criticism neglects to recognise the importance of individual human beings as makers of their own history and does not concern himself with the future as a basic dimension of history.

My point in analysing Hegel's argument against these varieties of historical writing is to give an indication of Hegel's 'blindness' towards history as future and towards human beings as historical agents. Hegel, even in his criticism of other approaches to history, cannot disengage himself from viewing history as a past and as something that can be approached only by our cognitive capacities.

events.’ (*IPH*, 17). The main flaw in any general history is that, instead of history, we are usually confronted with ‘a motley assortment of details, petty interests, actions of soldiers, private affairs, which have no influence on political interests, - they are (the historians) incapable [of recognising] a whole, a general design.’ (*IPH*, 19). History must be something more than a detailed and useless narrative. However, we should once again note that, even as ‘general’ history, history is still purely concerned with the past. As for human beings, although somebody might argue that general history considers them as historical agents, they are still confined to the status of ‘historical details’. My overall argument is that even if these varieties of history approach history not as past and even if they consider human beings as historical agents, Hegel fails to acknowledge it.

‘Pragmatic history’ aspires to be ‘a fully developed [impression] of a past age and its life.’ (*IPH*, 19). This kind of historian tries, instead of narrating mere events, to give them a determinate meaning. He aspires to bring to light the ‘inner continuity’, and ‘universal aspect’ of the historical events he writes about (*IPH*, 19). The problem in Hegel’s opinion begins when these historians try to look for subjective motives or when they focus on their own moral system and ‘...attacking events and individuals in the flank with their moral onslaughts, and throwing in an edifying thought, a word of exhortation, a moral doctrine, or the like.’<sup>24</sup>

The problem with Hegel’s criticisms, however, is still that he confines any approach to history to his own view. Pragmatic history refers only to the past and only to ‘universal’ aspects of history.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 20. The sentence is slightly altered.

One very strong indication of Hegel's reluctance to view history as something else besides knowledge of the past is his view on the possibility of extracting any moral lessons from our historical knowledge. Hegel strictly limits history to the field of epistemology. And in so doing, he makes an important remark about the possibility of using history as a 'moral lesson' for educating the people:

Rulers, statesmen and nations are often advised to learn the lesson of historical experience. But what experience and history teach is this – that nations and governments have never learned anything from history or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it. (*IPH*, 21).

History cannot be used as an example either for imitation or for avoidance. We cannot depend on history in order to learn how to deal with possible future difficulties. But if this is what Hegel believes, then history cannot be a science in the way that chemistry (for example) is. Because in chemistry, if we know the laws that govern the mixture of two elements, we can predict the viability of their chemical bond. In history though, we cannot use our past to predict the future. The reason that Hegel believes in the inability of history to provide us with a secure prediction of the future is that history never repeats itself.

Each age and each nation finds itself in such peculiar circumstances, in such a unique situation, that it can and must make decisions with reference to itself alone... Amid the pressure of great events, a general principle is of no help, and it is not enough to look back on similar situations [in the past]; (*IPH*, 21).

Here we can discern the different way in which Hegel uses the concepts of reason and science. Although he maintains that his philosophy is the (only) completed scientific system of philosophy, in his philosophy of history he does not believe that history can be treated as our sciences, that is, in order to find general laws and use them for our own purposes. As we shall see, he believes that history has a general law, reason, and the Spirit, that tries to fully comprehend itself and thus to be free. But we cannot regard Hegel's reason and Hegel's law along the lines of the causes and effects which we detect in the natural sciences. Every historian, who treats history in analogy with the other fields of common scientific research, is doomed to failure, according to Hegel. 'Only a thorough, open-minded, comprehensive view of historical situations and a profound sense for the Idea and its realisation in history can endow such reflections with truth and interest.' (IPH, 22). The 'Idea' here is a law that governs history, but it does not operate like our usual 'scientific' laws. It possesses necessity and does have a determinate function, but its necessity has nothing to do with the trivial mechanical necessity of the laws that are used in every other field. We will return to this point in more detail below.<sup>25</sup>

My claim is that Hegel so narrows his view on history that he cannot even allow to history to be used as a moral lesson for future historical decisions. What is more, he cannot allow history to function as the other sciences. His historical knowledge therefore seems to have no use at all.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Here we have an anticipation of Hegel's metaphysical claim that reason and the idea of freedom reigns in history.

<sup>26</sup> In my conclusions I argue that Hegel inclines to view history as 'theodicy'. Historical knowledge for Hegel has one and only one use, i.e. to persuade us that the historical process has a certain meaning and follows a certain pattern.

At the same time, when he speaks of the third kind of reflective history, namely 'critical history', Hegel, again, speaks only about knowledge and the past. Critical history is the principal method employed by Hegel's contemporary German historians:

'It does not constitute history as such, but rather the history of history; it evaluates historical narratives and examines their authenticity and credibility... Its distinguishing characteristic and intention are to be found not so much in the subjects it deals with, but rather in the acuteness with which the writer wrests new information from the narratives he examines.' (*IPH*, 22).

For such a historian, though, the greatest danger is to write, instead of a history, a script full of 'subjective fancies'. (*IPH*, 23).

The fourth and last kind of reflective history is 'specialised history'. This is, as its name indicates, a history of a specific part of the general life of a nation. 'History of the Art of the Ancient Greeks' is an example of this kind of history, or 'History of Roman law'. If this history can understand its subject in light of the general context of the history of the nation as a whole, then it can, according to Hegel, be a very interesting history. If, for example, we want to write the 'History of English law', we need to fully grasp the general history of the English nation. Knowledge remains the sole characteristic, for Hegel, of this history.

Having dealt with the different types of reflective history, Hegel now asserts that the third kind of history (besides original and reflective history) is the 'philosophical' history of the world:

The general perspective of philosophical world history is not abstractly general, but concrete and absolutely present; for it is the spirit which is eternally present to itself and for which there is no past. [Or it is the Idea.] Just like Mercury, the guide of departed souls, the Idea is truly the leader of nations and of the world; and it is the spirit, with its rational and necessary will, which has directed and continues to direct the events of world history. To gain an understanding of it and its guiding influence is the aim of the present investigation. (*IPH*, 24).

With this passage, Hegel closed his introduction to the 1822 and 1828 lectures on the philosophy of history; however, it raises a number of questions. First of all, is not every general perspective, by definition, an abstract one? In other words, how can Hegel argue for both the concreteness and absoluteness of his philosophical history? What is this 'spirit' which is eternally present to itself, and if it has no past, how can we speak of history? What exactly is the nature of such rationality and in what does the necessity of spirit's will consist? If that spirit directs the events of world history, and if we can be aware of its nature, why can we not predict the future course of our history?

Hegel himself tries to answer all these questions by means of a complete analysis of 'philosophical history'. In order to begin to grasp this analysis, I will now expand on some hints we have already come across that explain



philosophical history and supplement this discussion by quoting passages from Hegel's final paragraphs in *PS* that refer to history.<sup>27</sup>

I will begin with the last question. 'Spirit', (or 'reason' or 'Idea') is not a customary law in the sense that we can outline its function and implications. As we have already seen, Hegel's reason operates on a different (and, for Hegel, higher) level. It has nothing to do with cause and effect; on the contrary it consists in the active unification of them both.<sup>28</sup> In this way, although we can comprehend its nature, we cannot make any kind of predictions about Spirit, because such predictions are dependent on a cause/effect structure.

The necessity of spirit is its rationality. Its rationality consists in the fact that it follows its own purposes, its own goals. Spirit has to follow its own purposes and by doing so it possesses necessity. Once again, it is important to underline the fact that Hegelian reason is purposive. That means that it has nothing to do with the mechanical necessity of physics (for example).

As for the nature of Hegel's 'Spirit' and its concrete and absolute presence in history, I quote the following passages from his *PS*.

Consequently, until Spirit has completed itself in itself, until it has completed itself as world-Spirit, it cannot reach its consummation as self-conscious Spirit. Therefore, the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what Spirit is, but only Science is

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<sup>27</sup> This 'philosophical' history is Hegel's philosophy of history. As such, Hegel will analyse it in detail later in *IPH*. My only concern for the time being is to outline the basic characteristics of this approach. My intention is to show in what way Hegel believes that this is the right way to do history.

<sup>28</sup> Our understanding and its 'need' to separate the phenomena sees causes away from their effects. Hegel's reason, on the contrary, unifies through its holistic view what seems to be distinguished.

its true knowledge of itself... The movement of carrying forward the form of its self-knowledge is the labour which it accomplishes as actual History.

(PS, 488)

Nature, the externalized Spirit, is in its existence nothing but this eternal externalization of its continuing existence and the movement which reinstates the Subject... But the other side of its Becoming, History, is a conscious, self-mediating process – Spirit emptied out into Time; but this externalization, this kenosis, is equally an externalization of itself; the negative is the negative of itself. This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly just because the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance. As its fulfillment consists in perfectly knowing what it is, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its withdrawal into itself in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection.

(PS, 492)

In regard to the first passage, one can conclude first, Spirit is very similar to or exactly the same as the concept of God in Christianity. That is why religion can comprehend Hegelian Spirit, even if its comprehension is imperfect. By science, Hegel is here referring to his own philosophical system. Science can truly know Spirit, because science (philosophy) uses the appropriate language. That is, philosophy uses conceptual language, whereas religion

uses faith, feeling and representative language.<sup>29</sup> Spirit needs philosophy in order to attain self-knowledge, because only logic can bring to light what Spirit has previously known in a merely abstract way. Hence, human beings (insofar as they are logical) partake in Spirit's life but Spirit also transcends their knowledge in the name of its own self-knowledge.

It is questionable if Hegel is a monist.<sup>30</sup> If however we accept that for him everything in this universe is the manifestation of what he calls Spirit, then we have to understand his philosophy as a monistic one. Spirit becomes nature when it externalises itself. In nature, however, Spirit cannot understand fully itself, because nature, for Hegel, has no consciousness. Human beings with their reason do have consciousness. Spirit, through human beings and their historical efforts to understand themselves and their world, understands, 'digests' its nature through conceptualisation. Recollection for Spirit can be accomplished only through conceptualising. In this way Hegel appears to consider human history as the most essential part of Spirit's route to

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<sup>29</sup> Imaginative language, for Hegel, is not as clear and direct as the language of philosophy is. Hegel does not deny the power of literature and the power of faith to point towards truth. For him however, imaginative language is always a 'vague' language which uses myths, symbols and analogies instead of concepts.

<sup>30</sup> The debate continues between those who view Hegel as a philosopher who grounds (and reduces) everything in a single power (Spirit) and those who understand him as something different.

See: James Kreines, 'Metaphysics without Pre-Critical Monism: Hegel on Lower-Level Natural Kinds and the Structure of Reality', *The Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 57/58, 2008, pp. 48-70.

See also: Emilia Digby, 'Hegel's Monism and Christianity', *The Monist*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (October, 1896), pp. 114-119.

See further: F. la T. Godfrey, 'Hegel's Dialectic in Historical Philosophy', *Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 63 (Jul., 1941), pp. 306-310.

See also the very interesting view of Jon Stewart: Jon Stewart, 'The Architectonic of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 747-776.

It seems that both sides have strong arguments, which is more proof (if any were needed) of Hegel's ambiguity. My view, however, is that Hegel is a monist. I recognise in his philosophy (especially in his philosophy of history) an irreplaceable monistic attitude. Spirit is what makes everything to move like the Aristotelian God (the unmoved mover).

fulfillment. Yet of course, Hegel still needs to prove his theory by closely examining human world history. What remains to be done, then, is to follow him as he explains 'Reason in History'.

### **Reason in History**

My aim will be to make apparent that the Hegelian reason renders history: a) something that can be a past that we can know and b) something that cannot be the product of individual human beings. Hegel, as I intend to point out, bases both his metaphysical claim (that reason and its necessity reign in history) and his epistemological claim (that we can know history) in the particular nature and historical role of his reason. More than that, Hegel clearly distances his reason from individual historical activities and confines our historical knowledge to our historical past.

Hegel's approach to history is grounded on the peculiar way Hegel understands God's presence in history. God's existence in our world functions as the crucial Hegelian argument in favour of the actual existence within every single human being of the cognitive capacity to know history's pattern and history's plan. Hegel, however, although he acknowledges the possibility of knowing our history, denies to us (as historical individual existences) the ability to make history or to refer to history as something else besides a completed past. Kierkegaard's contribution thus to philosophy of history can be the underlining of exactly these points: we (human individuals) can create history and our history is not only (and mainly) our past as something to be known, but future as something to be decided about.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> I will say more about these points in my next three chapters. For the time being, it is enough for my argument to point out the direct philosophical connection, for Hegel, of God and history as Hegel perceives it.

Hegel uses one further word to refer to Spirit: 'absolute'. The Hegelian absolute can be considered either as something that transcends human experience or as something which is immanent to human experience. Walter A. Kaufman interprets the Hegelian absolute as something which is immanent to human experience.<sup>32</sup> J. N. Findlay does the same.<sup>33</sup> Karl Popper on the other hand views the Hegelian absolute rather as something that transcends human experience.<sup>34</sup> Anselm K. Min summarises all the views regarding the nature of the Hegelian absolute and he argues that the right way to view Hegel's absolute is to come with a third way to understand Hegel's absolute. Min argues that we must take the Hegelian absolute as something which synthesises finite and infinite while at the same time preserves the difference between them.<sup>35</sup>

I believe that in view of the Hegelian argumentation in *IPH* about God and considering also his argumentation in *IPH* and *PR* about the historical importance of the state, we must understand Hegel's absolute as immanent to human experience, but also as something that surpasses human individuals. This will be apparent from the forthcoming paragraphs.

What it is important however for my overall argument regarding Hegel's philosophy of history, is the fact that Hegel believes: a) that his 'absolute' can be approached by human understanding (and thus can be known) and b) that this 'absolute' one way or another exceeds human individuals.

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<sup>32</sup> See: Walter A. Kaufmann, 'The Hegel Myth and its Method', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Oct., 1951).

<sup>33</sup> See: J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958).

<sup>34</sup> See: Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. 2: *Hegel and Marx*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1945).

<sup>35</sup> See: Anselm K. Min, 'Hegel's Absolute: transcendent or Immanent?', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Jan., 1976), pp. 61-87.

Hegel identifies his 'reason', his 'Idea', his 'absolute' with God. Positive knowledge of God through our rational capacities is the solid ground that Hegel can count on for his historical analysis: "When God reveals himself to man, he reveals himself essentially through man's rational faculties;" (IPH, 39). Christianity provides the proof for Hegel's claim:

God has revealed himself through the Christian religion; that is, he has granted mankind the possibility of recognising his nature, so that he is no longer an impenetrable mystery. The fact that knowledge of God is possible also makes it our duty to know him, and that development of the thinking spirit which the Christian revelation of God initiated must eventually produce a situation where all that it was at first present only to the emotional and representational faculties can also be comprehended by thought. Whether the time has yet come for such knowledge will depend on whether the ultimate end of the world has yet been realised in a universally valid and conscious manner.<sup>36</sup>

We can reconstruct Hegel's basic assertions as follows:

- a) Christianity demonstrates the logic by which God reveals himself to humanity.
- b) We, human beings, can penetrate God's mystery through our cognitive capacity of reason.
- c) If we can, then we ought to know Him.
- d) In order to arrive at that knowledge we have first to realise the 'ultimate end of the world' in a 'universally valid and conscious manner'.

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<sup>36</sup> IPH, p.40. I quote the whole paragraph because I believe that it is central for my interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history.

The points that Hegel wants to make aim to directly connect God's revelation to human beings' cognitive ability to 'penetrate' God's mysteries. Christ took the shape of a humble man and taught us about the true nature of Him and His father. In this way Christianity showed that it was possible for humanity to know (through their logical capacities, that is, their reason) God, because now God is not anymore somewhere outside our world but lived in this world through Christ and still lives through Holy Spirit.

Hegel has already argued that human beings can know God through their rationality, although, indeed, he takes it for granted that we can know God in other ways (by means of faith or belief), even if this is not 'positive' knowledge. Nevertheless, we do now have the possibility of knowing God through our reason because God appeared in our world. Hegel, however, stresses the fact that, for him, this possibility is also our duty. He believes so, because reason is positive and objective knowledge, while faith is something subjective. This 'objectivity' obligates our logical capacities, (our reason) to always try to discover and understand it.

The notion of 'end' referred to above is not intended temporally. 'End' here means 'purpose'. That is, Hegel is arguing for knowledge of this 'purpose' as positive knowledge of God's nature, in human history. This (philosophical as Hegel names it) knowledge is objective, undeniable and common to all people (potentially) and, most of all, it is conscious. This 'end', this 'purpose' is the 'Idea of human freedom.' (*IPH*, 46).

Hegel, thus, uses Christian religion and theology for his own philosophical purposes. He translates theological arguments into philosophical ones. In Hegel's philosophy of history then, God is at the same time the presupposition

and the ultimate goal. James Kreines brings forward Hegel's 'metaphysical rationalism' as the crucial Hegelian doctrine.<sup>37</sup> He stresses Hegel's claim about the ultimate capacity of reason to ground and transcend human experience. In this way Kreines seems to point out the overall Hegelian logic but nonetheless he also recognises the importance of God for the Hegelian philosophy. Kreines however examines Hegel's approach to God as the basis of Hegel's overall philosophy and this is something that goes further than the scope of this thesis. Thomas J. J. Altizer also argues that Hegel grounds his philosophical thinking on God's existence in this world.<sup>38</sup> Altizer, however, focuses more on the general Hegelian reliance to Christianity, while my argumentation focuses on the significance of the Incarnation for the Hegelian philosophy of history.

Ultimately, Hegel's philosophy of history can be viewed as a theodicy, that is, as 'a justification of the ways of God.' (*IPH*, 42). Reason in history aims to disclose, analyse and know this theodicy. As we have already seen, Hegel argues that we need to arrive at a secure (and objective) knowledge of the 'ultimate end' of the world. Philosophical history above all, according to Hegel, serves the purpose providing meaning; otherwise by approaching history through causal thinking or pure skepticism one can be led to the precipice of total and incurable despair.

Incarnation provides Hegel with evidence of the presence of God in this world. And it is from this point that he goes on to examine world history. Hegel does not attribute any historical importance to individuals because, according to

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<sup>37</sup> See: James Kreines, 'Metaphysics without Pre-Critical Monism: Hegel on Lower Level Natural Kinds and the Structure of Reality', *The Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 57/58, 2008, pp. 48-70.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas J. J. Altizer, 'Hegel and the Christian God', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 71-72.



him, philosophical world history must ignore everything finite and subjective. The objective consists in the Spirit and its strife for self-realisation through human history.

Only nations/states can play a historical role. Hegel is quite clear about it when he states that:

The right which governs the ethical existence of nations is the spirit's consciousness of itself; the nations are the concepts which the spirit has formed of itself. Thus it is the conception of the spirit which is realised in history. (*IPH*, 51).

Individuals have no objective role in Spirit's self-realisation (and thus in history) because they are only partly rational beings.<sup>39</sup> Nations are the privileged means through which Spirit becomes conscious of itself historically, because they transcend the lives of their members. Nations exhibit no animal impulses. Nations have, (or try to acquire through their evolution in history), ethical existence, and these ethical principles are the laws by which they develop.<sup>40</sup> Freedom then is the sole ultimate historical fruit of Spirit's consciousness. This freedom can be historically actualised only through nations. As Hegel states:

'...the ultimate phase of its [spirit's] consciousness, on which everything depends, is the recognition that man is free. The spirit's own consciousness must realise itself in the world; the material or

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<sup>39</sup> With the exception of world-important individuals, who make through their actions history move on the next level. Even these individuals however, are not actual agents of history because they simply serve reason's will.

<sup>40</sup> Nation's laws are the heart of their ethical existence in Hegel's opinion because they objectify the desires of individuals that partake in them.

soil in which it is realised is none other than the general consciousness, the consciousness of the nation.’ (*IPH*, 52).

The above mentioned passage seems to constitute a contradiction. How can, on the one hand, ‘the recognition that man is free’ be the ultimate phase of Spirit’s consciousness, when, on the other hand, it is ‘the consciousness of the nation’ that grounds that consciousness? If we talk about man’s freedom, then we refer to individual freedom and not to the nation’s ethical existence. This looks contradictory; we need therefore to try a different approach. The ethical existence of the nation is constituted by its laws and these in terms consist in its ‘general consciousness’. Hegel here claims that only if national laws have recognised that man is free, can this nation be genuinely ethical.

In this way, Spirit comprehends itself and its freedom through nations, but Spirit’s ultimate self-consciousness will come only when a nation acknowledge that ‘man is free’ in its laws. ‘Man is free’ means for Hegel that every man is free. This freedom is the direct historical product of nation’s ethical evolution and it is reflected in nation’s laws.

So far I have analysed Hegel’s approach to the role that reason plays in history and I have argued that this reason renders history a past to be known from people’s logical capacities, while at the same time only Spirit and nations/states are historical agents. In order to further explicate Hegel’s claim that individuals do not play any (significant) historical role I need to clarify the exact nature of individuality in Hegel’s philosophy of history.

I have to stress once more that I analyse 'individuality' in the context of the Hegelian philosophy of history only in order to point out that Hegel does not consider individual human beings as historical agents. My interest lies purely in the historical role that individuals have according to Hegel's philosophy of history. Although we cannot avoid the obvious political implications of this Hegelian claim, I cannot expand my analysis farther than this towards political philosophy.<sup>41</sup>

Hegel writes: 'The **world spirit** is the spirit of the world as it reveals itself through the human consciousness; the relationship of men to it is that of single parts to the whole which is their substance.' (*IPH*, 52). Two points emerge from this quotation. The first is that when Hegel refers to 'world spirit' he means something that needs human consciousness in order to be revealed (to be historically actualised and to become object of knowledge). This does not mean that world Spirit is something outside of this world, though. The second point is that every single human consciousness is just a part of the whole. Moreover, the whole always surpasses its parts, so, although the parts are necessary for the existence of the whole, they are not of the same nature. In fact, single, finite human consciousness is nothing; it requires the whole to gain value and life.

It is through the repeated objectification of human consciousness in the organised life of the state that the world Spirit is constituted. This world

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<sup>41</sup> Esperanza Seade tries to give us a full depiction of the way Hegel defines 'people' and 'state' in his philosophy of history. See: Esperanza Duran De Seade, 'State and History in Hegel's Concept of People', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1979), pp. 369-384. While Seade recognises that Hegel does not attribute to individuals historical importance, he fails to point out the philosophical implications.

Spirit, on the other hand, is not merely the sum total of individuals; it is the whole that through its 'wholeness' transcends its individual parts.

Hegel then does not recognise the freedom of individuals because these individuals must be part of a nation in order to have any kind of freedom.<sup>42</sup> It is precisely this Hegelian argument that drove many of his interpreters to accuse him of failing to recognise atomic human rights.<sup>43</sup>

However, this rests on an oversimplification, for Hegel insists that every human being must take part in an organised society in order to have the opportunity of being a (complete) human being. Otherwise man would not be man. Spirit then uses reason and nations for its historical actualisation. 'Great individuals' are purely means to reason's will. The way Hegel defines the historical role of these 'great individuals' expands even further his claim about the historical role of individual human beings. Even Napoleon and Socrates are not straight-forwardly historical agents. They do not create history themselves. They simply obey 'the cunning of reason'. It is thus important for my argumentation to point out his claims about these 'great individuals', because this Hegelian claim proves even more my claim about the insignificance (in Hegel's philosophy of history) of individuals as historical agents.

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<sup>42</sup> Hegel uses by turns the term 'nation' and the term 'state'. But as we can see also in his *PR*, state with its objective structure is that which Hegel refers to.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Popper is the most obvious example of such an interpretation towards a Hegelian concept of freedom. Kaufman and Findlay argue (in my opinion successfully) against Popper's accusations. S. W. Dyde can offer us an alternative point of view. While he recognises that Hegel directly connects individuals' freedom to their belonging in a state, he also points out that every effort to define Hegel's notion of freedom must be accompanied by a simultaneous effort to proceed further than Hegel. Dyde claims that Hegel's own definition of freedom obliges us to do so. See: S. W. Dyde, 'Hegel's Conception of Freedom', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (Nov., 1894), pp. 655-671.

Spirit in history realises itself in human activities as these form political structure and are articulated in laws. Human beings as realised in historical activity are recognised through the laws of the state as free without further conditions.

The Orientals had despots as the leaders of their organised states, thus the Orientals granted freedom only to their despots. However, that cannot have been genuine freedom, according to Hegel, for it did not extend to every human being. The Greek and Romans granted freedom only to their citizens and had no problem keeping slaves; thus they too refused to acknowledge the freedom of every human being. Germanic nations (every single nation in North-Western Europe) came to realise that every human being is free. (*IPH*, 54-55).

‘Reason in history’ furnishes Hegel with his epistemological claim too, that is, that history is entirely past-orientated and (history) can be approached only as an object of knowledge. Hegel confines himself to an epistemology of history and is solely interested in discovering this knowledge in the past, finding there ‘reason in history’. Even when he refers to the future he does so simply to insist that future is valid only as long as can be deciphered by reason. This is immediately apparent from his references to future in *IPH*.

For example, Hegel makes specific statements about the future:

‘As to the politics of North America, the universal purpose of the state is not yet firmly established...North America cannot yet be regarded as a fully developed and mature state, but merely as one which is still in the process of becoming...In physical terms, America is not yet fully developed, and it is even less advanced in

terms of political organisation. It is certainly an independent and powerful state, but it is still engaged in developing its purely physical assets...America is therefore the country of the future, and its world-historical importance has yet to be revealed in the ages which lie ahead...' (IPH, 168-170).

The movement of world-history will not end with Hegel's time. Even philosophy will not be completed with Hegel's philosophy. Hegel gives us the USA as an example of the future of world-history. And in so doing, he admits that the world-historical importance of the USA is to be revealed in the future, suggesting thereby, an open and unknown future. However, he also maintains that the same necessity will prevail even then. This is the necessity of Spirit's evolution through human strife. Hegel's future, therefore, is nothing but a 'future past', for 'Spirit' and 'reason' will continue to prevail over individual human beings.<sup>44</sup>

Hegel clearly states how history becomes an object of knowledge:

Freedom discovers its concept in reality, and has developed the secular world into the objective system of a specific and internally organised state. It is this triumphant progress which gives history its interest, and the point at which reconciliation and existence for itself

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<sup>44</sup> Future in Hegel's philosophy of history, the way I examine it, is nothing but something that we can know when it will become past. The apparent Hegelian presumption regarding history as past is that the future is not yet completed (actualised) and thus not yet history. I am interested in pointing out the Hegelian disregard of the future as an important historical dimension. I do not however have to consider myself with the problems that arise with Hegel's 'eschatology'. My research tries to understand the way Hegel posits the historical dimensions. I have already argued that past is the only temporal dimension which guarantees us, for Hegel, epistemological security. This is enough for my purposes.

For those who would like to know something more regarding the way Hegel understands the future in his philosophy of history, Daniel Berthold-Bond can give us a satisfactory basic analysis. See: Daniel Berthold-Bond, 'Hegel's Eschatological Vision: Does History have a Future?', *History and Theory*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Feb., 1988), pp. 14-29.

are reached is now an object of knowledge: reality is transformed and reconstructed. This is the goal of world history: the spirit must create for itself a nature and world to conform with its own nature, so that the subject may discover its own concept of the spirit in this *second nature*, in this reality which the concept of the spirit has produced; and in this objective reality, it becomes conscious of its subjective freedom and rationality. Such is the progress of the Idea in general; and this must be our ultimate point of view in history...The further labour of history is that this principle should develop and unfold and that the spirit should attain its reality and become conscious of itself in the real world. (IPH, 208-209).

Reality is 'transformed and reconstructed' through reason and becomes so 'objective knowledge' of the historical reality. History then, according to Hegel, must follow reason's necessity and must become an object of human cognitive capacities.

### **Conclusions**

Now that we have the basic parameters of Hegel's approach to history I want to conclude the chapter by arguing for three crucial characteristics to his philosophy of history:

- 1) Hegel approaches history as an object of knowledge. For him, history can be known and we, as thinking human beings, can have a full and secure grasp on history's pattern, structure and ultimate goal. A correlate of this contention is that Hegel views history only as a completed past. Present and future must first become past and only then do they become history.

2) History can be known, because it has a specific goal: the realisation of the freedom of every human being as part of a well-structured state. Thus, Hegel bases his epistemological claim on a metaphysical claim. History has a specific agent which is Spirit; it has a specific method, which is reason, and individual human beings can only submit to such principles; they can never change them. In short, Hegel clearly does not attribute historical agency to individual human beings.<sup>45</sup>

3) This entire conception of history is grounded in the way Hegel defines and explains Incarnation. The (historical) presence of God in our world is Hegel's evidence for his peculiar conception of philosophy of history.

Hegel's main purpose in his philosophy of history is to persuade us that history does have a purpose.<sup>46</sup> His ultimate goal is not to predict or to forbid any kind of future. His ultimate goal is to reconcile us with our human past, present and future. Yet, he achieves this goal in an extremely ambiguous fashion. On the one hand, he places all humanity under the general guidance of reason, but, on the other hand, he does not provide any comprehensive way to understand what reason is. Its peculiar mode of procedure—unifying

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<sup>45</sup> Raymond Plant argues that reason in history (and the Hegelian philosophy of history in general) functions mainly as an analysis of the modern political culture. Raymond Plant, *Hegel*, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973). Plant is mainly focused on the Hegelian analysis of the modern state. In this way he is able to recognise Hegel's reason in history as something which is not interested in individuals but only in states, but Plant fails to acknowledge the importance of reason for the metaphysical claim of Hegel; because reason in history grounds, according to Hegel, history's necessity.

<sup>46</sup> Joshua Foa Dienstag considers Hegel's philosophy of history to be a well-organised 'seduction', in order for the Hegel to make us 'love' our history and all its atrocities. Dienstag focus on Hegel's effort to 'put all of history into one form...tie up all the loose ends, to bring every line of plot to a conclusion...' Joshua Foa Dienstag, 'Building the Temple of Memory: Hegel's Aesthetic Narrative of History', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Autumn, 1994), p. 725. In this way Hegel in Dienstag's opinion 'closes' himself into the past and cannot reach any future. Hegel on the other hand, could respond that philosophy of history examines only the past and the present of history, and does not exclude the existence of a future; what Hegel's philosophy of history excludes, is a future striped of its necessity.



instead of separating—does not solve the problem; it only *a posteriori* justifies historical events. Individuals do have rights, but what they lack is ultimate accountability for their actions. Whatever they do, they do not make history; they simply help reason make it.

Ultimately, Hegel is trapped in his own schema. History can be comprehended only in a way that makes history totally incomprehensible. Hegel's reason is active in our world and historical, but is simultaneously free from temporal limitations. Hegel's absolute view of history, (even if it is to be considered as a form of inter-subjectivity), cannot give us any proof of historical activity without at the same time forfeiting its metaphysical status. We are thus left only with the solace of Hegel's promise of reconciliation. The price we have to pay, though, is rather high; we have to abandon our historical primacy as active historical subjects.

## Chapter Two

### Kierkegaard's Concept of History

#### Introduction

In order to demonstrate how the appropriation of Kierkegaard would be beneficial to philosophy of history, we need to get to grips with his own take on history. Therefore, the next two chapters will consist of a detailed reconstruction of Kierkegaard's philosophy of history.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to provide an overview of the Kierkegaardian approach to history; second, to define in more detail some of the main characteristics of his concept of history. Throughout the chapter, my overall aim will be to demonstrate my orienting thesis that Kierkegaard, although he never provides a complete theory or philosophy of history, nevertheless presents us with a concept of the nature of history. I refer to a 'concept' because I consider his thinking about history to constitute a coherent intellectual effort to describe and understand the nature of the historical. A concept is not a full-blown theory, but nor is it a mere rhapsody.

Kierkegaard wrote three texts under the same pseudonym, Johannes Climacus: *Johannes Climacus*, (1841-2), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846).<sup>47</sup>

Without attempting to argue that the existence of a shared pseudonym is

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<sup>47</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, Johannes Climacus*, translated by Howard and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Hereafter *PF* and *JC* respectively.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Howard and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Vol.I. Hereafter *CUP*.

sufficient evidence for considering these texts to be proposing the same philosophical theory, I will claim that Kierkegaard's understanding of 'actuality', 'possibility', 'necessity', 'knowledge of history', 'doubt', 'belief', and 'passion' remains constant through-out these three books. Thus, my argument presupposes the conceptual unity of these texts.

In *PF*, Kierkegaard's primary interest is the problem of the Incarnation. On the face of it, therefore, the work may seem theological. My point of departure, however, is that through his struggle to theorise the Incarnation, Kierkegaard passes by way of history. Hence, in order to discuss the Incarnation, Kierkegaard ends up exploring the very nature of history.

In this chapter, I will contend that: a) for Kierkegaard history is always the history of human beings; hence its nature is directly related to their freedom of will. In other words, human beings make history by using this freedom; and b) Kierkegaard considers historical fact as an uncertain object of cognition. To put it bluntly, we cannot achieve the same scientific accuracy in our knowledge of history as we do in the natural sciences.

Therefore, in what follows I focus on the answers that Kierkegaard gives: a) to the ontological question 'What is the nature of history?' and b) to the epistemological question 'Which is the nature of our historical knowledge?'. I will argue that these questions cannot be separated from each other, according to Kierkegaard: ontology and epistemology are intertwined. In fact, Kierkegaard argues that for his epistemological thesis that historical knowledge cannot be of the same precision as knowledge of the laws of

nature, precisely because of an ontological thesis that there is no necessity in history, hence no general and necessary laws.<sup>48</sup>

In order to demonstrate the above interconnections between the ontological and the epistemological in Kierkegaard's concept of history, I pursue an extended and detailed analysis of 'The Interlude' in *PF*. I do so because, in many ways the Interlude provides the very core of Kierkegaard's concept of history.

### 'The Interlude'

It is, of course, by no means a startling claim to emphasise the significance of the 'Interlude' for an understanding of the Kierkegaardian concept of history. Many commentators have drawn the same conclusion. For example, Robert C. Roberts takes 'the Interlude' to be 'a defense of a thesis concerning historical beliefs in general.'<sup>49</sup> Jacob Howland argues that '[C]limacus's general aim is clear: he wants to safeguard faith from the tyranny of philosophical reason...[H]e hopes to refute the doctrine that history is the unfolding of necessity...'<sup>50</sup> Peter Fenves claims that Climacus here argues against any kind of secure historical knowledge because 'such a [temporal] moment discloses only the constant annihilation of possibility in actuality...'<sup>51</sup> What all these commentators share, despite all their ultimately divergent interpretations, is the contention that 'the Interlude' contains Kierkegaard's concept of history *in nuce*.

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<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard's 'necessity' is logical necessity and not causal necessity. For Kierkegaard however, the lack of logical necessity within history renders problematic any application of necessary historical laws that could help us make a historical 'prognosis'. I discuss this point at length later in the chapter and also in Chapter Three.

<sup>49</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Faith Reason and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*, (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1986), p.99.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.158.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Fenves, *"Chatter": Language and History in Kierkegaard*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.132.

However, this is where agreement ends, for each of these commentators diverge considerably both in what they understand Kierkegaard's concept of history to be and in their evaluation of how cogent Kierkegaard's argument is. Hence, Roberts, Fenves and Pojman argue that Kierkegaard in 'the Interlude' tries to answer the epistemological question of the nature of the historical knowledge. For example, Roberts holds that: '[T]he Interlude is organized as a refutation of two theses: First, that the truths of history are necessary truths; and second that they are knowable by the direct deliverances of the senses.'<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Peter Fenves understands 'the Interlude' as an argument against historical knowledge and he argues that for Climacus:

...[I]t no longer makes sense to assert that one can recognise a temporal moment and thus gain historical knowledge...So faith is a form of knowledge; it both provides a criterion for unification and refuses the principal criterion of all thought.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, Mercer focuses on the ontological questions the Interlude raises. He argues that the 'Interlude' is 'related to the structures of the self and its relation to time...The problem of necessity is discussed, but in relation to the problem that necessity creates for human freedom, history, and existence.'<sup>54</sup>

Finally, there are a number of scholars who treat the Interlude merely as a polemic against Hegel. It is here, they argue, Kierkegaard reveals himself in direct opposition to Hegel (or to Martensen). For example Niels Thulstrup

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<sup>52</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*, p.101.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Fenves, p.132-133. See also Louis P. Pojman, 'Kierkegaard on Faith and History', *Int. J. Phil. Rel.*, 13: 61-62.

<sup>54</sup> David Emery Mercer, *Kierkegaard's Living-room: the Relation between Faith and History in Philosophical Fragments*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), p. 119.

argues that within the Interlude Kierkegaard is able to demonstrate the differences between his own 'conceptual clarification of history' and Hegel's philosophy of history. The main difference here, moreover, concerns the role that necessity plays in history. Hegel finds necessity within history while Kierkegaard is excluding necessity from history.<sup>55</sup>

Jon Stewart similarly conceives the Interlude in terms of Kierkegaard's relationship with Hegelian thinkers. He argues that 'Climacus uses the argument about the categories of possibility, actuality, and necessity as the preliminary analysis for his account of history, which now follows in "the Interlude".'<sup>56</sup> And what is crucial is that this account of history was a polemic aimed at Martensen, specifically his "Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy from Kant to Hegel" delivered in the Winter Semester 1838-1839.<sup>57</sup>

In what follows, I argue that all the above interpretations are incomplete. Rather, in the Interlude Kierkegaard attempts to answer both the ontological and the epistemological question simultaneously. Indeed, furthermore, even if Kierkegaard did intend to polemicise against a specific philosopher, in so doing he generates his own authentic concept of history; hence, what is at stake in the Interlude is not the question of whom it is directed against but rather the question of what Kierkegaard's arguments are.

Kierkegaard himself underlines the importance of the 'Interlude':

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<sup>55</sup> Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, translated by George L. Stengren, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.362-364.

<sup>56</sup> Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel reconsidered*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.359.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.374.

Both Thulstrup and Stewart consider the 'Interlude' as revelatory of Kierkegaard's thinking on history. The only reason that I do not discuss in detail their interpretations here is that both of them focus on the relation of Hegel and Kierkegaard – the topic of Chapter Four.

If a speculative thinker were to say that he comprehended the necessity of a historical phenomenon, I would indeed bid him to occupy himself for a moment with the misgivings set forth in all simplicity in the Interlude between chapters IV and V of *Fragments*.

(*CUP*, 53-54)

Kierkegaard here refers specifically to 'the Interlude' in order to underline his own alternative approach to the 'necessity of a historical phenomenon' to that of a 'speculative thinker'. While the question about who Kierkegaard considers to be a 'speculative thinker' is one which continually rages in the critical literature, for my purposes the crucial point is that Kierkegaard intends the Interlude as an argument about the nature of a historical phenomenon.<sup>58</sup>

*PF* itself begins with these three questions:

- a) 'Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness?'
- b) 'How can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest?'
- c) 'Can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?'

All of these questions are questions of 'history'. And yet Climacus says nothing about history in the first few chapters of the book. It is only when the reader reaches the Interlude that one finds Climacus discussing issues closely related to historical phenomena. At this point, there are two questions being considered:

- a) 'Is the Past More Necessary than the Future?'

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<sup>58</sup> The problem of the 'identity' of the 'speculative' thinker will be tackled in my fourth chapter.

- b) 'Has the Possible, by Having Become Actual Become More Necessary than It Was?'<sup>59</sup>

What becomes apparent to the reader at this point is the focus of the Interlude on temporality (past and future) and the relation of necessity to this temporality (along with the latter's relation to the other modalities). History concerns the past and any historical fact is by its nature something that is temporal. Hence, it becomes even clearer that the Interlude is essentially concerned with history, when one reads its subtitles:

- a) 'Coming into existence'
- b) 'The historical'
- c) 'The past'

I will examine each of these in turn in what follows.

#### 'Coming into existence'

Before we proceed to an analysis of Climacus' arguments, we must clarify one central issue, namely the meaning of 'existence'. The Hongs write that "Existence," "exist," pertain to temporal and spatial being or actuality.' (*PF*, 297). Climacus explains his own view of the meaning of 'existence' in the third chapter of *PF*, 'The Absolute Paradox'. Here, Climacus defines 'existence' in a long note, arguing against Spinoza's theory of 'existence':

Consequently, [for Spinoza], the more perfect, the more being; the more being, the more perfect. This, however, is a tautology...Consequently, the more perfect the thing is, the more it is; but its perfection is that it has more *esse* in itself, which means that the more it is, the more it is...He [Spinoza] explains *perfectio*

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<sup>59</sup> The capital letters belong to the text.



by *realitas, esse* [he explains perfection by reality, being]...But to go on, what is lacking here is a distinction between factual being and ideal being...

(PF, 41)

Kierkegaard wrote on the front flyleaf of his copy of the *Gfroerer* edition of Spinoza's *Opera*:

Re pg. 15. Lemma 1. Note II. This dissolves in a tautology, since he explains *perfectio* by *realitas, esse*. The more perfect a thing is, he says, the more it is; but in turn he explains the perfection of a thing by saying that it has in itself more *esse*, which therefore says that the more it is the more it is. In a logical sense, this is correct—the more perfection, the more it is; but here being has an altogether different meaning than it factually is.

(PF, 290)

This argument is well-known as a proof of God's existence: God is the most perfect being; the most perfect being incorporates existence; therefore God exists. Yet, in opposition to this, Climacus (and Kierkegaard in the last quotation) identifies a radical difference between 'factual being' and 'ideal being'. Climacus dissociates essence from existence. Hence, Climacus separates the ideas we have of objects (any kind of object, even God) and the actuality of the existence of these objects. Theologically, what is at issue here is the possibility of a logical explanation of the Incarnation, and it is for this reason he concludes this note: '...for the difficulty is to grasp factual being and bring God's ideality into factual being.' (PF, 42).

It seems that Climacus considers existence to be completely different from ideality. Ronald M. Green argues that Climacus here relies heavily on Kant's arguments against the ontological proof of the existence of God.<sup>60</sup> The most important issue here, however, is Climacus' account of existence. Existence is not simply an attribute of essence. Existence is 'factual being'. The simplest way to understand 'existence' is to relate it to spatio-temporal 'facts'. 'Factual being' is not an essence but a given fact within the spatio-temporal conditions of our universe.<sup>61</sup>

With this conceptual clarification in mind, the first question that Climacus asks in the Interlude runs:

How is that changed which comes into existence [*blive til*], or what is the change (*κίνησις*) of coming into existence [*Tilbivelse*]? All other change (*αλλοίωσις*) presupposes the existence of that in which change is taking place, even though the change is that of ceasing to be in existence [*at voere til*].

(PF, 73)

Every change that occurs in an entity that exists, presupposes that something in that entity remains the same, ensuring an identity before, at the time of and after the occurrence of change. If the change is a change in space (motion or *κίνησις*), then, what remains the same through this movement is the entity's

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<sup>60</sup> Ronald M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant, The Hidden Debt*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp.122-123.

<sup>61</sup> Someone might argue here that this 'factuality' of existence implies something that can be known. After all, what we usually call 'a given fact' refers to its possibility to be grasped through theoretical comprehension. And, if this is true, then how can this be reconciled with the claim (which I go on to make) that the historical cannot be the object of certain knowledge? There is a very direct and simple answer: Kierkegaard's 'factuality' of existence refers specifically to its actualisation within space and time. Historical occurrence is always something that occurs as an actuality. Kierkegaard's 'factuality' is identical to this 'actuality'. The Kierkegaardian 'given fact' refers only to its complete actualisation within temporality and bears no relation to the possibility of being cognised.

body. If the change is a change in the body of an existing thing (*αλλοίωσις*), then what remains the same through this change is the identity of the thing. When people get older, their body changes but their identity remains the same. If I put on some weight over the years and acquire some wrinkles, I am still the same person.

When something comes into existence, what exactly is the change that occurs to that thing? In other words, when something comes into our world, can we talk of a change, and if yes, what exactly is that change? Kierkegaard is here tapping into a whole philosophical tradition which struggles to theorise such change adequately. This is because in order for a thing to change while entering our world, something must remain the same and so ensure an identity before, during and after the entrance of that thing into existence.<sup>62</sup>

If, in coming into existence, a plan is intrinsically changed, then it is not this plan that comes into existence; but if it comes into existence unchanged, what, then, is the change of coming into existence? (PF, 73)

Climacus argues that the only change we can identify in a thing that comes into existence 'is not in [its] essence but in [its] being' and more specifically 'from not existing to existing' (PF, 73). In this way when something new comes into existence, what really happens is a change in its being; before the change its being was 'not-being' and after the change it consisted in a 'positive' being. Having said that, Climacus argues, can we talk of the same

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<sup>62</sup> Kierkegaard's analysis here is essentially Aristotelian. Dario Gonzalez argues that Kierkegaard follows Aristotle and that Climacus' analysis owes much to Kierkegaard's study of Trendelenburg: *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, Volume 6, Tome I, *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, edited by Jon Stewart, (Ashgate, 2007), p.313.

Fenves also points out that Climacus uses Aristotelean arguments: Fenves, p.132.

thing before and after its coming into existence? In response, he argues that only in the case of possibility and its actualisation can we legitimately speak of the same thing passing through the change of 'coming into existence'. To understand this, however, we must proceed further with his argument.

Climacus's next step is to identify 'not-being' with possibility and 'being' with actuality:

But such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility, and a being that is being is indeed actual being or actuality, and the change of coming into existence is the transition from possibility to actuality. (*PF*, 74)

On the basis of such identification Climacus goes on to pinpoint the essential difference between ideal being and factual being. Only the latter exists in our spatio-temporal world and participates in actuality. Immediately, one must consider a possible objection to Climacus' thesis: the only thing that seems to remain the same when a possibility is actualised is its essence or its ideality. For what underlies the transition from non-being to existence, is the very 'idea' of that being. Climacus however, has already refuted the existence of the 'ideal'. Furthermore, he now reinforces this refutation by stating that: '[T]he necessary is always related to itself and is related to itself in the same way, [thus] it cannot be changed at all.' (*PF*, 74). His argument is clear: if the necessary cannot change at all, then the necessary cannot come into existence, because every coming into existence is a change.

In consequence, the following picture emerges: Climacus ascribes necessity to the ideal and distinguishes both of them from 'existence'. What remains to

be understood, however, is the absolute opposition that Climacus goes on to infer between existence and necessity, ideal and historical occurrence.

Mercer interprets Kierkegaard's absolute opposition between necessity and existence, as a logical conclusion. He argues that if the necessary is an actuality, then the necessary must first become possible. If however, the necessary is possible, then 'one could conclude that the necessary is also not possible.'<sup>63</sup> Hence, necessity is not an actuality.

I argue that to interpret Kierkegaard's absolute dissociation of necessity and actuality in this way may provide the basis of his argument, but ultimately it does not fully capture Kierkegaard's point regarding history and necessity. Kierkegaard is providing more than a logical analysis. As we shall see, Kierkegaard argues that doubt is not a matter of a possible lack of knowledge but a matter of will. In this way, Kierkegaard argues that we cannot aspire to overcome doubt with the acquisition of more knowledge. To overcome doubt is not a matter of knowing 'historical' necessities. To overcome doubt is purely a matter of (free) will. Kierkegaard thus does not remain at the level of a purely logical analysis of the paradox of a possible necessity. Rather, his argument aims to make apparent the need (regarding historical existence) for a shift from epistemology to moral decisions. If we want to rule out doubt from history we do not need knowledge but will. We fail to fully understand this if we believe that Kierkegaard wants to make a logical analysis.

If we accept that the necessary is always in the same way, is it possible to entertain the thought that it either possibly is or possibly is not? Such is the line of thought by which Climacus ascribes necessity to the ideal and

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<sup>63</sup> Mercer, p. 122.

separates it completely from the actual: the actual, before becoming the actual, is only possible (hence, it either will be actualised or will not be actualised). In conclusion, therefore, Climacus generates a mutually exclusive pair of binary terms: on the one hand, there are necessity and 'ideality' and, on the other, possibility and actuality.<sup>64</sup>

### Necessity/Freedom

One of the basic claims of this thesis is that Hegel and Kierkegaard hold different positions regarding the existence of necessity in history. Hegel argues that necessity lies in the heart of history while Kierkegaard argues that necessity cannot be part of history. Hegel also directly associates necessity with freedom within history. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, considers the pair necessity/freedom in history mutually exclusive. In order, for us, to fully capture the way Kierkegaard understands the nature and the role of freedom in history we must closely examine and analyse his overall argument about necessity and freedom in history (coming into existence).

Climacus' next step in the Interlude is to claim that if necessity cannot be a part of any 'coming into existence', then 'All coming into existence occurs in freedom...Every cause ends in a freely acting cause.' (*PF*, 75). At stake in this claim are the following presuppositions:

- a) Necessity and existence are incompatible spheres (a point we have already discussed in detail).

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<sup>64</sup> Jon Stewart argues that, when Climacus denies that necessity is the unity of possibility and actuality, he is not opposing Hegel but Kant: *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.355-359. The critical issue here is, however, that Climacus denies any relation between necessity and the pair possibility-actuality. In this way, Climacus also opposes Hegel, because for the latter necessity can be found in the realm of actuality. I will say more about this in my fourth chapter.

- b) Everything that comes into existence, (thus into actuality), has a free cause.
- c) Even if we can detect natural laws in actuality and hence some kind of 'necessity', this does not refute the above, for if we were to follow events back to the beginning of the causal chain, we could discover freely acting causes alone.

For Climacus, as we have seen at length, there are only two possible ways of 'being': either as the 'ideal' and therefore as necessary or as the factual in which there resides no necessity. The crucial inference which Climacus now makes on the basis of this already established dichotomy is that a complete lack of necessity indicates freedom. So, although Climacus does not here provide us an elaborate definition of either necessity or freedom, he does indicate the relation that exists between them – one of mutual exclusion: either freedom is posited or necessity, but never both. Therefore, it becomes evident that Climacus directly opposes any kind of mediation between necessity and freedom; a point which will be crucial when comparing Kierkegaard's thought with that of Hegel.

Kierkegaard (through Climacus) is so absolute about the incompatibility of necessity and freedom within history that for him even the so-called necessary laws of nature do not demonstrate the presence of necessity in actuality. What is Climacus' reasoning for this contention? It runs as follows: when we discover causes (natural laws) that seem to necessarily produce certain effects, regression down the causal chain to the first cause will always return us to a freely acting cause. Thus Climacus writes:

The intervening causes are misleading in that the coming into existence appears to be necessary; the truth about them is that they, as having themselves come into existence, definitively point back to a freely acting cause. As soon as coming into existence is definitively reflected upon, even an inference from natural law is not evidence of the necessity of any coming into existence. (*PF*, 75)

Climacus' argument can be reconstructed as follows:

- a) Any 'coming into existence' has to undergo a change.
- b) Necessity prohibits any kind of change.
- c) Thus, no 'fact' can occur necessarily.
- d) When we come across certain natural laws that imply that certain facts occur in a necessary way, returning to the first cause in the causal chain will always demonstrate the occurrence of this 'coming into existence'.
- e) Thus, even strict causal chains necessarily have a free beginning.

The nature of necessity is still to be determined. It might be argued on this basis that causal necessity can coexist with history and with historical contingency. If, however, this is the case, it is difficult to conceive Kierkegaard's absolute separation of them. The answer, I argue, is simple: Kierkegaard's specific conception of 'necessity' here is a form of logical necessity. This is apparent because of Kierkegaard's acceptance (even within the Interlude) of the existence of natural laws and the existence of causal necessity. I would contend, therefore, that his argument proceeds as follows: whenever we wish to fully know historical existence by means of causal necessity, this involves the application of logical analysis. This logical



analysis, however, is incompatible with the very nature of historical existence.

I return to this issue at length in what follows.

Climacus thus, creates an insurmountable hiatus between 'necessary' and 'existing' being. For Climacus freedom can only be where necessity cannot be. A radical dualism is in play. Although Climacus has yet to define these concepts, their meaning does become determinate by means of their mutual opposition.

Roberts interprets Climacus' argument in the following way: 'Even If we can explain the actualisation of possibility *a* by reference to the actualisations of other possibilities (which are the causal antecedents for *a*) still this string of possibilities is only one among an indefinitely large set of strings.'<sup>65</sup>

Roberts thus emphasises the contingency of the first cause in any causal chain as the crucial argument Kierkegaard uses to demonstrate the lack of necessity within historical existence.

Kierkegaard indeed makes this point but only to underline the contrast between absolute causality and historical existence. As we shall see, by 'historical existence' he means specifically human historical existence. Roberts' point is useful for the examination of causality in nature but not enough to successfully reconstruct Kierkegaard's analysis of 'historical existence'.

#### 'The Historical'

As I have already established, one primary characteristic of history is that it 'has come into existence' and thus we have to attribute to it freedom and lack of necessity. Another primary characteristic is that history refers only to

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<sup>65</sup> Roberts, p. 106.

human history and not to nature's history. Nature does exist, but has no memory of its existence; and although nature has a past, a present and a future, nature cannot be 'free' because nature cannot be aware of its past in a way that could enable it to decide about its present and its future. It is in this vein that Climacus speaks of a 'redoubling' of human being's 'coming into existence':

Yet coming into existence can contain within itself a redoubling, that is, a possibility of a coming into existence within its own coming into existence. Here, in the stricter sense, is the historical, which is dialectical with respect to time. (*PF*, 76)

I am arguing that Kierkegaard is here clear that 'history' refers solely to human history. Only human beings have the capacity to relate themselves to their past in a way that makes them capable of freely choosing their future.<sup>66</sup>

Mackey nicely sums up this direct connection between freedom and history:

The eternal, which is also the necessary, has no history in any sense. It sustains no relationship to possibility, actuality, change, or freedom. Nature is pure synchrony (spatiality), save for the fact that it has, as a whole, come into being. History is pure diachrony (temporality), save for the fact that it presupposes space as its locus...Strictly speaking, nothing happens in nature. It is always, if cyclically, the same, for which reason there are laws of nature. But historical events, for which there are no laws, are the operations of

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<sup>66</sup> In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard expresses the idea that the self is a relation that relates itself to itself. Nature does not have this relation, and consequently it does not have the 'redoubling' that constitutes historical (human) existence. See: Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980). (Hereafter *SUD*). I will explore this assertion further in Chapter Three on the 'Kierkegaardian historical subject'.

freely working causes terminating in the working of an absolute free cause.<sup>67</sup>

While I agree with Mackey's stress on the absence of necessary laws in historical events, it strikes me that Mackey fails to take his conclusion far enough, so as to draw out the philosophical implications of Kierkegaard's approach to history. As I have already argued, what previous commentators of the Interlude have failed to discern is that Kierkegaard is attempting to answer both the ontological question and the epistemological question about history therein.

In order to defend properly my above mentioned claim I will schematise the way in which Climacus answers both of these questions. In regard to the ontological question about the nature of history Climacus argues: a) history is always human history and b) freedom reigns within it, (the kind of freedom that excludes any kind of necessity). In terms of the epistemological question, there is still much to determine; however, preliminarily one can conclude that the knowledge we have of nature by means of natural laws is unavailable for historical cognition.

However, before proceeding further with the epistemological question, we need to emphasise once more the fact that Climacus states that history, human beings and freedom constitute a fully unified nexus. Furthermore, this implies that such a direct connection between the 'historical' and 'freedom' leaves human beings as the sole historical agents. Human beings alone make history through their own free choices. Past and present are human actualities while human future is human possibility. And so to redefine the present in the

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<sup>67</sup> Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard*, (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), p.127.

light of the past and the future is the distinguishing mark of a properly human freedom.

Howland makes a similar point in regard to Climacus' argument in the Interlude: '[O]nly human beings are self-consciously historical, continually redefining themselves in terms of their actual pasts and possible futures. And this "dialectical" process of redefinition, or of mediating the present in the light of actual pasts and possible futures, is a sign of human freedom.'<sup>68</sup>

However, missing from Howland's account are the following elements: a) human freedom is mainly oriented towards future decisions and b) human freedom is a matter of human will (and so of human ability to make decisions). I will argue further below and in Chapter Three that for Kierkegaard human beings can become complete selves only within history and only by continuously actualising their freedom to make decisions. What is more, what Howland fails to see, is that this freedom is always accompanied by an acceptance (from the side of the people who freely make these decisions) of human responsibility.

### The Past

It has been already argued that for Kierkegaard necessity cannot be found within history. In what follows, I will give further details on how Kierkegaard defends the absolute lack of necessity in history. To be more specific, I will analyse how Climacus argues against the notion that the past can be necessary. By doing so, I intend to further exhibit Kierkegaard's rejection of necessity in history.

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<sup>68</sup> Howland, p. 161.

Usually, when we think of history we think of the past. In fact, the customary and perhaps most trivial definition of history is the 'past' of something, or something that happened in the past. Yet, as we have seen, for Climacus, although nature has a past, it cannot really have a history. Only human beings have history, because only human beings can understand what it means to have a past, a present and a future. Moreover, Climacus argues at the same time that necessity cannot be found within history. One possible objection to this latter point runs as follows: the past is necessary because the past cannot be changed:

What has happened has happened and cannot be undone; thus it cannot be changed. Is this unchangeableness the unchangeableness of necessity?... What has happened has happened the way it happened; thus it is unchangeable. But is this unchangeableness the unchangeableness of necessity?

*(PF, 76-77)*

Climacus' response is, once more, simple: every past, before becoming a past was a present; this present became present through 'coming into existence'. And, as we know, the present comes into existence freely. Although we cannot undo or change the past, we can think of this past as different: it could have been other than it is, i.e. the past is contingent.

Here we have one more indication of the nature of Kierkegaardian necessity: it is logical necessity. Contingency allows room for causal necessity (under specific conditions). As previously noted, this logical necessity has certain philosophical implications regarding the ability to fully know historical facts. We cannot expect ourselves to be able to fully know and understand history

by applying logical analysis to historical facts. The existence of causal necessity applies merely to nature and not to human history. Moreover, logical analysis is totally incompatible with (human) historical existence. In this way Kierkegaard does not depend on contingency to exclude necessity. Kierkegaard renders history a field of actualisation, instead of a field of cognition.

For example, we cannot change how World War II ended; this, however, does not mean that this past could not have developed in the opposite direction. Mercer is thus right to underline that:

The past is the result of the choice or choices made among the possibilities of the future in the present and those possibilities are different and varied. It does not follow that one particular choice result in a particular past... If the past and the future are necessary then they are neither past nor future, but simply are.<sup>69</sup>

The concept of history involves continuous change, and consequently involves freedom to so change. Mercer's analysis, however, still fails to acknowledge that Kierkegaard's analysis is not focused on the effort to understand how past history 'results' in present and future history. On the contrary, Kierkegaard argues in favour of the actual existence (and thus historical existence) of (human) freedom of will and (human) freedom of choice.

As Climacus spells out, there exists a continuous interaction between our past, present and future. We understand ourselves and our reality through the continuous effort to choose between different possible choices. Hence,

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<sup>69</sup> Mercer, pp.127-128.

Climacus points out that, if it is asserted that we lack the freedom to make choices, so that we are simply subjected to necessity, then we end up living in a permanent present, instead of willing history. In fact, as we have seen, Kierkegaard has already made clear that 'necessity always relates itself to itself at the same way' (*PF*, 74). It follows therefore that, necessity is eternally and so cannot become 'history'. What is absolutely crucial here is that Kierkegaard focuses on the capacity of human beings to will and so choose to make history, rather than focusing on the ability of human beings to know history.

Furthermore, Climacus goes on to provide another reason to avoid attributing necessity to the past. He claims that if we consider the past necessary, we must attribute such necessity to the future as well, because:

If the past had become necessary, the opposite conclusion could not be drawn with respect to the future, but on the contrary it would follow that the future would also be necessary. If necessity could supervene at one single point, then we could no longer speak of the past and the future. To want to predict the future (prophecy) and to want to understand the necessity of the past are altogether identical, and only the prevailing fashion makes the one seem more plausible than the other to a particular generation. (*PF*, 77).

In order to understand Climacus' argument here, one needs to keep in mind that for him 'necessity is and it always is in the same way'. If we accept that the past is necessary, then, one must also accept that the future, which has already been transformed into the past, was also necessary. That is, each

past moment is previously a present moment and, before that, a future moment.

By arguing the above, Climacus intends to indicate that, if we accept that our past is necessary, then the future and the present of that past must also be necessary. Such is the reason behind his claim that 'prophecy' and understanding the past as necessary 'are altogether identical'. We can predict the future only if it occurs in a necessary way (i.e. according to necessary laws). Moreover, and this is the crucial point, Climacus employs the same line of reasoning on the past: we cannot understand the past as necessary, for the past is merely one out of many equally possible pasts that could occur.

Therefore, we are now able to take a step back to reflect on Climacus' argument so far. This argument, we have seen, constitutes an answer to the ontological question of history: the nature of history is to be conceived exclusively as the history of human beings and so must be directly connected with 'freedom'. Provisional conclusions are also possible concerning the epistemological question of history: one cannot apply 'scientific' methods to history in order to know it in the same way as one applies them in the field of nature. We cannot aspire to find necessary laws in history.

This is also the reason why Climacus goes on to argue that knowledge of the past does not confer necessity upon it:

The past is not necessary, inasmuch as it came into existence; it did not become necessary by coming into existence (a contradiction), and it becomes even less necessary through any apprehension of it... If the past were to become necessary through the apprehension [of it], then the past would gain what the



apprehension lost, since it would apprehend something else, which is poor apprehension. If what is apprehended is changed in the apprehension, then the apprehension is changed into a misunderstanding... [K]nowledge of the past does not confer necessity upon it—for all apprehension, like all knowing, has nothing from which to give. (*PF*, 79-80)

Climacus' argument can be reconstructed as follows:

- a) While the past certainly existed, it is not necessary.
- b) Our apprehension of the past cannot make it necessary.<sup>70</sup>
- c) If, through apprehension, one could make it necessary, then either one would apprehend the past in the wrong way, (because the past is not necessary), or such apprehension would have the power to change the essence of the past, which—for Climacus—is absurd.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, Climacus here turns far more explicitly to the epistemological question of history and so the question of the knowledge we are able to have of history: no logical necessity is either discernible in history or can be attributed to it by means of cognition. While one can be sure, for example, about simple facts (the defeat of Germany in the Second World War, for example), one cannot fully apprehend how exactly it happened that this outcome occurred rather than any other.

Such an example demonstrates why for Climacus it is so important to directly connect the ontological issue of the nature of history to the epistemological issue of the knowledge of history. Freedom (which is defined as lack of necessity), on the one hand, characterises the nature of history, but, on the

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<sup>70</sup> Kant obviously disagrees with this philosophical claim. Such a disagreement cannot, however, be further pursued in this thesis.

<sup>71</sup> Again, this is not absurd for a transcendental idealist.

other hand, excludes any scientifically accurate historical knowledge. Causal necessity applies only to nature, so human history cannot be totally analysed by means of causal thinking.

That is, what emerges in the Interlude is a demand to approach the whole field of philosophy of history from another perspective. A demand emerges to treat history differently. Such an alternative conception of history would ensure that historical knowledge remains open to doubt and alternative forms of apprehension. And such an alternative conception of history is only made possible for Climacus by means of the central contention that 'history' is *par excellence* the field of freedom and so a realm in which human beings cannot be totally secure about their knowledge. When Climacus excludes necessity from history, this brings about a complete paradigm shift in the philosophy of history, starting with the ineluctable 'uncertainty' of our historical knowledge.

Moreover, the significance of such a shift is precisely what I have argued is neglected by all the above mentioned commentators. That is, they fail to take seriously the fact that for Climacus the problem of 'freedom' applies equally on an ontological and epistemological level historically. At the very moment that Climacus removes any necessity from history, he generates uncertainty in historical cognition. As scholars, we therefore cannot analyse his argument in the Interlude from either merely the ontological level of the nature of history or merely from the epistemological level of historical knowledge. To do so would radically distort Climacus' newly-won perspective.

#### The context to the Interlude

The conclusions Climacus reaches in the Interlude need to be placed in a broader context, for their purpose can only become fully clear if we consider their role in *PF* as a whole. The question that orients *PF* is the extent to which one is able to come theoretically to terms with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Climacus answers this question first by considering logical and scientific methods as a possible means of understanding the Incarnation, but, unsurprisingly, in the course of his argument, this approach is rejected wholesale. The Interlude in particular contributes two significant claims to this overall argument: a) historical facts, like the Incarnation, cannot be known beyond any possible doubt and b) doubt is not overruled by further knowledge but by an act of will.

We have already thoroughly examined Climacus' argument concerning historical facts and the nature of their knowledge. Before I proceed on analysing the way Climacus approaches doubt, it would be beneficial to my analysis to offer the general context of the Interlude.

The reason, that makes me to refer to the context of the Interlude after the Interlude and not before it, is that 'context' here can be defined as a further conceptual justification of the statements we examined in the Interlude. That is, we need first to know what is argued in the Interlude, because we, in a way, need to start with the 'facts'. Here, as 'facts' we take the Kierkegaardian statements concerning history and the historical.

This section also is a useful introduction to the way Climacus argues about doubt, belief and freedom in the last section of the Interlude. It is so, because the problem of the exact nature of belief and doubt concerned Climacus through his three texts *JC*, *PF* and *CUP* and not only in the Interlude. Hence,

examining the way Climacus approaches the problem of belief and doubt in *JC*, *PF* and *CUP* can help us understand better his argument in the Interlude. Climacus' general view of the nature of freedom in these three texts can introduce us to the way he approaches freedom in the last part of the Interlude. It will become easier for us to fully grasp his final approach to freedom if we, first, examine the way freedom is approached through the whole *oeuvre* of Climacus.

Climacus' argument in the Interlude over the nature of history and the nature of our historical knowledge is part of a more general attack aimed at those who argue that we can overcome our doubts about the Incarnation through historical knowledge or through scientific methods.<sup>72</sup> It is in this vein that in *CUP* Climacus returns to a passage from *PF*:

As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that despite the historical—indeed, precisely by means of the historical—has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for this eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than merely historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical. (*CUP*, 15)

The problem with a philosophical approach to the Incarnation is central to Kierkegaard's thought even prior to *PF* and *CUP*: '[C]hristianity's claim that it had come into the world by a beginning that was simultaneously historical and eternal had caused philosophy much difficulty;' (*JC*, 134-135). In each of these three texts, the same pseudonym, Climacus, is employed, and this

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<sup>72</sup> For a thorough examination of the disputes in Denmark in Kierkegaard's time about the correct philosophical interpretations of the Incarnation, see: Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 'Martensen's Doctrine of Immanence and Kierkegaard's Transcendence in the Philosophical Fragments', pp.336-377.

suggests to me that it is through this pseudonym of Climacus that Kierkegaard most fully explicates his position concerning the knowability of the Incarnation. Hence, the arguments in the Interlude to a large extent rest on and contribute to this broader context of Climacus' writings as a whole.<sup>73</sup>

At the heart of Climacus' analysis in each of these three texts lies the problem 'of the confusion of historical and eternal categories' (i.e. freedom and necessity), the problem of the definition of actuality and the definition of doubt. We have already followed the fate of the first two problems in the Interlude. Before I turn to the third one it would be beneficiary for my analysis to consider their role more generally in Climacus' oeuvre.<sup>74</sup>

In *JC*, for example, the problem of necessity is articulated as follows:

Philosophy, however, wanted to do something even more difficult: it wanted to permeate everything with the thought of eternity and necessity, wanted to do this in the present moment, which would mean slaying the present with the thought of eternity and yet preserving its fresh life. (*JC*, 142-143)

Having stated the problem thus, Climacus continues to explore the possibility of a relation between necessity and actuality. This is a question to which he

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<sup>73</sup> It is worth noticing that Kierkegaard remains close to Hegel here, for the latter also places the Incarnation at the centre of his philosophy of history (as I have demonstrated in Chapter One).

<sup>74</sup> I cannot argue that the existence of the same pseudonym (Climacus) as the author in *JC*, *PF* and *CUP* proves their intellectual and conceptual proximity. I will not claim that the texts mentioned above are totally and directly connected to each other. I will argue however, that the context of the three Climacus's works provides a common link between these books. I argue that Kierkegaard in his effort to find an alternative approach to the Incarnation to those of Hegel and his followers worked out his own concept of history in 'the Interlude'. These three books however constitute the necessary general context for the complete understanding of the Interlude.

James Giles, in his introduction to *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, edited by James Giles, (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 3-10, explores the problem of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity.

will answer negatively in the Interlude. Indeed, in *CUP* Climacus underscores this position:

Placing necessity together with the interpretation of world history, as has been done by modern speculative thought, has only caused great confusion, whereby possibility, actuality, and necessity are confused. (*CUP*, 343)

The nature of doubt and belief and their role regarding the problem of the historical knowledge finds, for Climacus, its final solution in the last section of the Interlude. In the second part of *JC*, however, Climacus gives us his first attempt to define them. One of the ways it is possible to discern that Climacus' definitive answer is in the Interlude is that Kierkegaard makes a very similar point (to the one he makes in the Interlude) in his Journals:

It is claimed that arguments against Christianity arise out of doubt. This is a total misunderstanding. The arguments against Christianity arise out of insubordination, reluctance to obey, mutiny against all authority. Therefore, until now the battle against objections has been shadowboxing, because it has been intellectual combat with doubt instead of being ethical combat against mutiny.<sup>75</sup>

Apparent in both *PF* and the Journals is Kierkegaard's insistence that knowledge is not appropriate means to battle against doubt. On this issue, Climacus represents Kierkegaard's view. The broader context makes this even more apparent. Already in *JC* one can detect a shift from an epistemological view of our existence to an ethical one. Faith, rather than

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<sup>75</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Vol. I 778 (Pap. VIII A 7), edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970). (Hereafter *JP*).

knowledge, is able to counter doubt. Such a development continues throughout *PF and CUP*. In the latter text Climacus points out that ethical knowledge is prior to any other knowledge.<sup>76</sup> Acquiring ethical knowledge, however, means being able to decide about our lives. It is a matter of will. Kierkegaard, or Climacus, always defines actuality in terms of making decisions and thus, for him: 'The individual's own ethical actuality is the only actuality.' (*CUP*, 327).

Unsurprisingly given these points of convergence, all three texts are in agreement on the nature of historical cognition. As we have seen in the Interlude, knowledge of the historical cannot aspire to being 'absolute' or complete; there will always be a 'gap' in our knowledge constituted by the very moment of 'coming into existence'. Objective scientific laws have no application in the field of history. Similar views are promulgated in *CUP* and *JC*, as we shall now see.

Indeed, it is in *JC* that Climacus first notices the 'inappropriate' confusion of necessity and history which will be so important for the argument of the Interlude:

...[I]t seemed strange to him that people talked so imprecisely, that they confused historical and eternal categories in such a way that when they seemed to be saying something historical they were saying something eternal. (*JC*, 134)

Historical knowledge is but a relative knowledge and as such cannot act as a remedy to our doubts. In *JC*, Climacus specifically refers to the problem of 'objective thinking' in relation to the problem of doubt in general: 'Thus it would

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<sup>76</sup> See for example: *CUP*, p. 317, where Climacus refers to Socrates.

be a misunderstanding for someone to think that doubt can be overcome by so-called objective thinking.' (*JC*, 170). Without delving into the problem of what exactly Kierkegaard means by the term 'objective thinking' in any detail, it is surely correct to note that it includes some reference to objective scientific methods.<sup>77</sup> In the Interlude, as we have seen, Climacus will argue that such 'objective thinking' is not applicable in the field of history.

Climacus' argument concerning the lack of necessity in history and the freedom that pertains in actuality is not restricted only at the Interlude. Instead, it is explored also in *JC* and *CUP*. Climacus in the last section of the Interlude will further define the exact nature of the relations between knowledge, belief, doubt and freedom in history. What we should know however, about the context of this last section, is that Climacus underlines the contingency of the historical. Such contingency refers both to the nature of history and it signifies the lack of necessary laws pertaining to freedom in the field of history and hence to the impossibility of complete historical knowledge.

... [T]here lies here the entire misunderstanding that recurs time and again in modern philosophy: to make the eternal historical as a matter of course and to assume an ability to comprehend the necessity of the historical. Everything that becomes historical is contingent... (*CUP*, 98)

In the last section of the Interlude Climacus, as we are about to see, argues that doubt is not the result of 'less' knowledge but, instead, it is a matter of will. Climacus will argue that the existence of freedom in history results at the

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<sup>77</sup> In *CUP* Climacus refers to 'objective thinking' in terms of a thinking that can be acquired through objective means and so is more 'credible' than 'subjective thinking'. Of course Climacus' arguments in *CUP* are ultimately intended to invert this relation: it is subjective thinking that it is more 'reliable' than objective thinking. What it is important here for my analysis is to underline the fact that objective thinking includes scientific methods.



lack of 'absolute' historical cognition. He will continue arguing that doubt and belief are responses to this freedom. That is, because we are free (in history), we can either choose to doubt or to believe (in history and the historical). Freedom and doubt and belief are absolutely interconnected.

#### Doubt, belief, will and freedom in history

Climacus has already argued that freedom and not necessity exists within history. From this ontological claim he has also argued that we cannot know history in an absolute manner. Climacus now will conclude his argument concerning both his ontological claim and his epistemological one by defining the exact nature of belief and doubt. He will argue against those who claim that doubt results from lack of knowledge and thus 'more' knowledge can 'nullify' doubt.<sup>78</sup>

Climacus will relate freedom in history with freedom of will and freedom of choice. He will explain doubt and belief as direct products of these two freedoms and in this way he will conclude his argument in the Interlude.

Climacus states twice that 'immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive.' (*PF*, 81-82). The problem comes with 'reflection' (*PF*, 81). Those who think that they can overcome doubt through certain and secure historical knowledge are mistaken. We have already seen that Climacus argues that there is no secure historical knowledge. Now he goes on to state

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<sup>78</sup> The 18th century was the 'age of enlightenment', the age of reason. People believed in the power of reason to clear up any mystery. A further development of this intellectual attitude was the 'Jesus of history' debate. People like Friedrich Schleiermacher and David Friedrich Strauss argued against the historical accuracy of the Gospels and tried to use reason in their effort to explain the Bible.

Kierkegaard found himself living within this historical/intellectual context and he definitely argued against the importance of reason for faith because he believed that he had to defend faith from logic and reason. This is why Kierkegaard tries so hard in the 'Interlude' to separate belief and reason arguing that belief and faith are products of will and not of reason.

that, if we wish to overcome the kind of doubt that comes with reflection, we have to do so by means of our will instead of cognition.

That is, Climacus here claims that belief and doubt are acts of freedom, expressions of the will, rather than products of cognition and theoretical understanding: ‘...belief is not knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of will.’ (*PF*, 82-83). Thus, for Climacus, ‘The conclusion of belief is no conclusion but a resolution’. The term ‘conclusion’ here refers to a logical process, whereas ‘resolution’ consists in an act of will. Hence, Climacus argues that belief and doubt are not modes of knowledge, but opposing passions. (*PF*, 84).<sup>79</sup> We are free either to doubt or to believe. We are free to remain skeptical in the face of the possible interpretation of the historical facts or we can will to believe them. Precisely because every ‘coming into existence’ occurs freely, one can never be fully certain about it: historical cognition can never be certain. This is why Climacus adds: ‘Belief is a sense for coming into existence...’ (*PF*, 84).

It might be argued that there are historical facts known to us without any kind of act of will. When a car, for example, crashes into another car, this is an indisputable fact; we cannot choose either to believe it or to doubt it. Climacus though, does not consider this mere fact of the crash as ‘historical’. Instead, for Climacus, a historical fact includes the ‘interpretation’ of this fact as well. Questions such as ‘Whose fault is this accident? Is it really a car accident or it is a ‘fake’ one for the shooting of a movie?’ are inextricably involved here. Kierkegaard has already asserted, as we have seen, that only human beings can have history, because only human beings can be aware of the active

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<sup>79</sup> ‘Passion’ here does not signify emotion or sensual desire. It refers instead to an act of will.

connection between their past, their present and their future. Immediate sensation of the bare fact does not constitute a historical fact for Kierkegaard. Historical agents need to mediate these mere occurrences through interpretation. Another objection is possible here, however: it might be argued that scientific facts of nature also need interpretation, so why can't one consider these as historical facts? Kierkegaard's answer is that belief and doubt are not modes of knowledge. Scientific facts need interpretation but such interpretation is epistemological. On the other hand, the interpretation of historical facts takes place through the will; it is therefore an existential characteristic of our historical existence.

The raw immediacy of what happens does not constitute the historical fact. Interpretation is needed and yet, Climacus emphasises, such interpretation will never bring about the kind of knowledge involved in cognition of nature. What is more, precisely because history is always the history of human beings for Climacus, reflection on the intention, motivation and willing involved in history is absolutely necessary. This is the reason why for Climacus the ontological question cannot be separated from the epistemological one.<sup>80</sup>

It follows that history requires the active participation of human beings, choosing actions, intending actions and willing actions. It is this activity Kierkegaard designates with the term 'passion'.

In order to pinpoint this active participation in a more precise manner, it is worth turning to Roberts' analysis of the epistemology implicit in the Interlude.

Roberts reconstructs Climacus' concepts of belief and doubt as follows:

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<sup>80</sup> Mercer points out that 'freedom and faith become the elements that are the most central to the historical.' He further argues that 'the matter of history is not a metaphysical question but an existential question.' (Mercer, pp. 138-141). What he is not doing, however, is to show us how these two Kierkegaardian claims about history and the historical are interconnected.

No historical personage (or indeed any event at all) is a flat, straightforward, self-interpreting brute datum given to an unambiguous apprehension. Every historical judgment, whether made by an eyewitness of the personage in question or by someone in a subsequent generation dependent on testimony, is shaped ultimately by a set of beliefs held by the individual making the judgment, which beliefs form a kind of interpretive mold out of which the judgment emerges, and in virtue of which the judgment is certified.<sup>81</sup>

While there is much to be applauded in this passage, what I dispute in Roberts' interpretation of the Interlude is his contention that it is such epistemological issues alone that are at stake. For Roberts, the epistemology laid out above is 'the central insight of Climacus's Interlude.'<sup>82</sup>

I am claiming that these epistemological issues presuppose initial conclusions concerning the ontological nature of history. It is, to repeat, only by approaching Climacus' arguments in the Interlude through both questions that its meaning, purpose and function becomes completely clear.

### Epilogue

We must be very careful when approaching Kierkegaard's thinking. He uses different pseudonyms; he 'plays games' with his readers in order to engage them personally; he uses different writing styles, sometimes writing as a poet, sometimes as a 'humorist' and a novelist and sometimes as a 'philosopher'. As George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare put it:

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<sup>81</sup> Roberts, pp.126-127.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.126.

'Kierkegaard is not only a writer who demands extremely difficult interpretative judgments on the part of the reader, he also continues to provoke in equal measure an antipathetic sympathy and a sympathetic antipathy amongst his readers. He therefore continues, nearly 150 years after his death to be a controversial as well as a defining figure in the history of modern thought.'<sup>83</sup>

However, philosophers should not be intimidated by such difficulties, for they are able to provide additional motives for reflection. Kierkegaard is a provocation to philosophy:

Out of love of humankind, out of despair over my awkward predicament of having achieved nothing and of being unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, out of genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I comprehend that it was my task: to make difficulties everywhere.

(*CUP*, 186-187)

Hence, if we consider history to be known through the application of general and necessary laws, (the way nature can be known), our job as philosophers would be much easier. Historical existence would be more certain and secure. If, on the other hand, we subscribe to Climacus' concept of history, then everything suddenly becomes insecure and 'scientific' accuracy is unavailable to us. Yet, we must still attempt on this view to become responsible for the making of our history. Of course, this might seem an impossible task; personally each one of us may feel too 'small' to try to influence history or to

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<sup>83</sup> Introduction to *Kierkegaard the Self in Society*, edited by George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.20.

try to understand it. But then again, this too fulfils Climacus' promise: 'to make difficulties everywhere'.

## Chapter Three

### The structure of the Kierkegaardian “Self”

#### Introduction

In *PF* Kierkegaard argues that necessity is irreconcilable with temporality. In fact, he argues for something more, that only freedom is reconcilable with temporality, and such freedom cannot coexist with necessity. What is more, just as with necessity and freedom, the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal cannot coexist either. And yet, in *The Concept of Anxiety* (hereafter *CA*) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (hereafter *SD*), Kierkegaard argues that the human ‘Self’ is an active union of all the above pairs.<sup>84</sup> What is even more perplexing is the fact that Kierkegaard published *PF* on June 13, 1844 and *CA* on June 17, 1844. This sharpens the tension between the two seemingly contradictory positions even further and the purpose of this chapter is to understand how Kierkegaard is able to understand the relation between necessity and freedom in such opposed ways.

My thesis is that in *PF* Kierkegaard refers only to logical necessity whereas in *CA* and *SD* he refers to the ‘existential’ necessity of our given limits (our given human nature, our body, our society, our established relationships, everything in general that it is already given to us). His point, then, is as follows: first, we cannot understand history through logical analysis (hence, there is no logical necessity in history) and secondly, even if we are free to create ourselves through our personal choices, we still have to accept our ‘objective’ situation.

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<sup>84</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, translated by Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).  
Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Even so, as Kierkegaard argues in *CA* and *SD*, we still must accept these necessities as our personal choices; hence, we cannot escape our personal responsibility for the creation of our life.

Kierkegaard labels this kind of freedom, 'entangled freedom' (*CA*, 49). It 'rules' both in history and in the creation of the human self. I use the word 'creation' because, for Kierkegaard (as I will contend in this chapter), the human self is a dynamic process grounded in freedom of will and freedom of choice. For Kierkegaard, choices necessarily involve passions. What does Kierkegaard mean by 'passion'? The term is related to 'interest'. We are 'passionate' about something, only and only if we take personal interest in it. Passion thus, is not something arbitrary, it is not something opposed to reason. Passion does not refer to something irrational, but to personal engagement.

The main argument in this chapter will be that the structure of the Kierkegaardian 'Self' as it is depicted in *CA* and *SD* can be analysed as the task of becoming a Self through personal choices. This task can be accomplished only within history. In fact, this task is our personal history. If we understand history in this way we have:

- a) to understand as history only our (i.e. human) history;
- b) to put at the centre of this history individuals-persons-selves-agents (individuals, because for Kierkegaard only individuals really exist, everything else is nothing but a convenient abstraction; persons, because only through personal choices do we acquire a Self; agents, because we actively create both our selves and our history; selves because Kierkegaard stresses again and again the fact that we can have a 'Self' only through our choices); and



c) to include in this concept of history, alongside the past, the future and the present as well. In this way, Kierkegaard shifts the crux (and the nature) of history from a theoretical understanding of the past (as in Hegelian philosophy of history) to an active union of personal choices that refer at the same time to the past, present and future. This Kierkegaardian concept of history is a non-deterministic process, which puts freedom of will and freedom of choice (along with personal responsibility) at the very core of history.

I conclude that for Kierkegaard, human beings are the only historical agents. It is impossible for other beings to contribute to history because, for Kierkegaard, history can be made only by those beings who possess the requisite consciousness to realise their past and connect it to their present and future. This capacity can only be found among human beings. Even if one could assert, for example, that the weather plays an active role in the making of history, we still cannot, for Kierkegaard, attribute agency to the weather, because weather lacks the requisite consciousness. For the same reason, neither animals nor 'destiny' count as historical agents.

It follows that theoretical comprehension and logical analysis are not the appropriate means to examine history. However, this raises another problem: why, then, does Kierkegaard seemingly indulge in logical analysis in 'the Interlude'; indeed, how can I even attempt to write a PhD thesis to the Kierkegaardian approach to history, if history eludes theoretical comprehension? This seems to generate another paradox, much like the one Kierkegaard speaks of in *PF*. My answer is simple: Kierkegaard describes history as a future created by individual choice. In this context, theoretical

comprehension is not the primary 'instrument' for understanding history and the historical. However, and this is key, the previous claim does not exclude the possibility of using theory in order to conceptually clarify the problems that arise when approaching history. Kierkegaard employs logical analysis in 'the Interlude' precisely because he has to theoretically defend his non-theoretical definition of history in 'the Interlude'. It is, however, just an interlude, a theoretical clarification. Indeed, generally, one can claim that Kierkegaard does not entirely disregard logical argumentation, in fact, in *CA* and in *SD* he heavily relies on his own philosophical argumentation to persuade us of his own unique approach to the problems of anxiety and despair.

As for the problem of trying to write a philosophical thesis on the Kierkegaardian approach to history, my argument is that, as long as one does not consider theoretical argumentation and logical analysis as the primary and unique sources of historical analysis, they can still be used for theoretical clarification.

What, however, cannot be forgotten, for Kierkegaard, is that personal experience is the primary means of approaching historical facts. For Kierkegaard, the creation of our selves signifies the creation of our history and *vice versa*.

#### Freedom and necessity, temporality and eternity

In their historical introduction to *CA*, the Hongs make the following claim:

Kierkegaard dealt with the problem of freedom in three of his pseudonymous works: *Philosophical Fragments* defines the ontological ground of freedom and its realm, whereas *The Concept*

*of Anxiety and The Sickness unto Death* consider the anthropological aspects of freedom. (CA, p.viii)

The Hongs thus argue that in *PF* Kierkegaard describes the nature of freedom, while in *CA* and *SD* he describes the way it manifests itself in human beings. The problem with this line of argument, however, is that the three works do not—at least at first blush—seem to stand in such a line of continuity. There are seeming problems of consistency between them.

For example, in *PF* Kierkegaard states the following: ‘All coming into existence occurs in freedom, not by way of necessity.’ (*PF*, 75). He continues: ‘[O]nly the eternal has absolutely no history.’ (*PF*, 76). That is, Kierkegaard argues that existing human beings exist in freedom and so lack necessity and eternity. And yet, what Kierkegaard writes elsewhere seemingly contradicts this. So, in *CA* Kierkegaard states that:

Man is a synthesis<sup>85</sup> of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is a spirit. (CA, 43)

The spirit is something that participates in the eternal.<sup>86</sup> And if this is the case (i.e. if spirit has an eternal dimension), how can Kierkegaard claim at the same time that the eternal has no history? That is, if man (who exists in

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<sup>85</sup> Kierkegaard speaks of a ‘synthesis’ when he wants to describe the structure of human self. Synthesis in this context is neither a Hegelian mediation nor the necessary result of a logical negation. Kierkegaard is very careful to point out that synthesis within the human self is the product of freedom because synthesis is posited by the spirit in freedom. In this way, this Kierkegaardian synthesis cannot be either a product of logical necessity or a mediation which, according to Hegel, necessary grounds the opposites which mediates. Freedom lies at the core of this Kierkegaardian synthesis and not necessity.

<sup>86</sup> I interpret Kierkegaard’s ‘spirit’ as follows: a) when it comes to human beings spirit signifies self-consciousness and b) when it comes to the relation between God and human beings spirit is the human ability to understand that God is our ultimate ontological ground. In other words, I interpret the Kierkegaardian spirit as the only human activity that can help human beings to really understand themselves as free beings who are grounded in God. I will have the chance to expand, clarify and defend my interpretation in my further analysis in this chapter.

history, thus in time) is a spirit, surely eternity has some relation with time?

Moreover, in *SD* Kierkegaard goes on to make the following claim:

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation;...A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity... (*SD*, 13)

In light of this, how can Kierkegaard's claim in *PF* that the eternal (and so necessity) cannot be found in existence be understood? Kierkegaard claims that human beings are (partly at least) eternal, does this not imply that necessity can be located within the realm of existence? Moreover, how can Kierkegaard argue in *PF* that necessity does not coexist with freedom, if in *SD* he clearly states from the very beginning that human beings are a synthesis of necessity and freedom?

The only possible answer to such a paradox is to respond that in these works Kierkegaard is talking about different kinds of 'freedom' and 'necessity'. This is my answer: 'freedom' in *CA* means something quite different from 'freedom' in *PF*. That is, in *PF* freedom refers to temporality in general (which of course includes free will and freedom of choice as well). In *PF* freedom pertains to every aspect of existence and so has a wider field of reference than freedom of will and freedom of choice. In *CA* and *SD* freedom is always freedom of will and freedom of choice. That is, in *CA* and *SD* freedom is no more the 'general' freedom that lacks any logical necessity, as freedom in *PF* does. In *CA* and *SD* freedom is 'existential', that is, freedom is purely a matter of

human will and choice. An individual, however, may have freedom of will and freedom of choice, while he is not able to avoid other necessities.

One legitimate solution to the above paradox is, therefore, to explain freedom in *PF* as the opposite of logical necessity, and freedom in *CA* as freedom of will and freedom of choice. This is the means of solving the problem: Kierkegaard argues in *PF* that freedom and necessity cannot coexist, because necessity in this text refers to logical necessity and freedom characterises the whole spectrum of existence. On the other hand, in *SD* Kierkegaard argues that each human being is an active union of freedom and necessity, because necessity here is not abstract logical necessity, but is the given conditions in any specific human life.<sup>87</sup>

In *PF* Kierkegaard thus attempts to avoid the problems inherent to a form of 'idealism' which identifies reason (i.e. logical necessity) and existence (i.e. reality).<sup>88</sup> It is for this reason he insists on separating existence (reality) from necessity (necessary logical sequences).

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<sup>87</sup> Anthony Rudd stresses the fact that for Kierkegaard: 'Abstract thinking is perfectly legitimate, so long as it does not forget that it is abstract and mistake its abstractions for realities.' Anthony Rudd, 'Speculation and Despair: Metaphysical and Existential Perspectives on Kierkegaard', *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, edited by James Giles, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 32. The problem (in my opinion) with Rudd's analysis is that he does not make the necessary connection between *PF*, *CA* and *SD*. In this way Rudd cannot fully disclose the Kierkegaardian approach to the problem of freedom.

Poul Lubcke closely examines the problem of the possible meanings of freedom in Kierkegaard's *PF*, *CA* and *SD*. He argues that the word 'necessity' has another sense in *PF* from the sense that has in *SD*. Poul Lubcke, 'Freedom and Modality', *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, 2000, p. 98. Lubcke however seems unable to point out the exact relation of freedom and necessity in *PF* and thus he cannot fully disclose the exact way in which Kierkegaard uses freedom and necessity in *PF*.

James Giles claims that freedom in *CA* '...has the special possibility of being able to bring our free will into clear relief.' James Giles, 'Kierkegaard's Leap: Anxiety and Freedom', *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, p. 80. Giles however does not try to directly connect freedom in *CA* with freedom in *SD* and thus he fails to capture the exact historical role that freedom plays for human beings.

<sup>88</sup> See for example Kierkegaard's extended note in *PF*, p. 41, where he follows Kant's argument that 'there is a distinction between factual being and ideal being.'

Hence, we are now in a position to accept Kierkegaard's approach of freedom and necessity both in *PF* and in *CA* and *SD*. In *PF* necessity is independent of temporality (it 'is and only is') because it is logical abstracted necessity, and freedom refers to the lack of this specific necessity. Hence, in *PF* what defines necessity is the lack of freedom, and what defines freedom is the lack of necessity. These two, by definition, cannot co-exist. In *CA* and *SD*, however, necessity is a very different beast and so is freedom. The kind of necessity at play here is 'existential' necessity as opposed to the 'logical' necessity of *PF*. Existential necessity is not irreconcilable with the (existential) freedoms of will and choice. Existential necessity refers to: a) the necessary and unchangeable structure of every single existing human being and b) the necessary given conditions of every single (existing) human being's life.<sup>89</sup>

While logical necessity directly conflicts with freedom, existential necessity can be harmoniously united with freedom of will. In *CA* Kierkegaard examines anxiety as a positive indication of freedom of choice and freedom of will (I will examine how Kierkegaard deploys his arguments further on in my analysis), and in *SD* he analyses the nature and the structure of human Self as the active union of (existential) necessity and (existential) freedom.

Graham M. Smith identifies three distinctive aspects of selfhood 'which help to differentiate Kierkegaard's account from that of other thinkers.' The first is that: 'selfhood is not simply a matter for philosophical speculation. For

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<sup>89</sup> John Milbank also stresses Kierkegaard's opposition to the 'reality' of logical necessity. He thus states that: ...[N]ecessary logical sequences and determinate sets of categories are but formalized and arbitrary abstractions (respectively), from an endless fictioning of possibilities which renders any attempted self-critique of reason, any attempt to know how we know, and thereby to acquire a standard to measure authentic knowledge—genuinely grasped objectivity—coterminously infinite. John Milbank, 'The Sublime in Kierkegaard', *HeyJ* XXXVII (1996), p. 302. The problem with Milbank's approach is that he cannot (or he does not wish to) offer us any positive definition of Kierkegaard's use of freedom in *PF*, *CA* and *SD* and thus he fails to disclose the exact way Kierkegaard connects freedom and necessity in these texts.

Kierkegaard, selfhood must be understood (or more correctly apprehended) existentially.’ Smith goes on to argue that for Kierkegaard selfhood is not something passive but, on the contrary, is an active process, a task.<sup>90</sup> What Smith fails to point out is the historical aspect of this distinct Kierkegaardian ‘selfhood’.

For the time being it is enough to define this selfhood as ‘existential’ in the sense that the active union of freedom and necessity it presupposes does not refer to logical necessity and absolute freedom. Nevertheless, the problem of how to understand the union of temporal and eternal in *SD* remains. And yet this obstacle is surmountable, if one understands that the paradox is dissolved once one sees temporal Self of *SD* as grounded in God. Only by so doing can temporality and eternity be distinct but compatible in an active union.

#### The human Self

Kierkegaard argues in *SD* that the human Self is grounded in God:

Such a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another...The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. (*SD*, 13-14).

This ‘another’ that grounds the human self is God. Before analysing this relation further, we need to consider how Kierkegaard defines the human self and why this is so important for our understanding of the Kierkegaardian concept of history. Being a self is not something pre-established or fixed for Kierkegaard in *SD*. On the contrary, being a self is: a) a task, b) this task is to

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<sup>90</sup> G.M. Smith, ‘Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political’, *History of European Ideas* 31 (2005), p.39.

accept responsibility for our choices (and the anxiety and the despair that follow) and c) this task can be accomplished only in time.

The more consciousness the more self; the more consciousness the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also...The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself,...to become oneself is to become concrete. (*SD*, 29-30).

This 'concreteness' of the self refers directly: a) to specific choices and b) to choices that can be made only within time. These choices can be made only because human beings have freedom of choice. Human beings can actualise this freedom of choice through their will. They can will because they have the freedom to do so. In addition, this freedom can be actualised only in time. Becoming a self thus, refers directly to a task that involves freedom of will and freedom of choice, and this task happens in time, thus happens within history.

In this way, understanding the Kierkegaardian self can give us a better and deeper understanding of what history is for Kierkegaard. If in *PF* and specifically in the 'Interlude', general, theoretical depiction of the nature of history is given, in *CA* there is to be found a further definition of the significance of freedom for human subjects, and additionally in *SD* the 'becoming' of the human self is added to the mix.

Freedom is the crucial factor for history and human selves. To put it bluntly, becoming a self cannot occur without freedom or history, because becoming a



self is a task that can be accomplished solely through freedom of will and choice in history and only in history.<sup>91</sup>

If in *PF* the theoretical union of history and freedom becomes clear, in *SD* the exact way human selves are history and freedom is revealed. My thesis is that history, freedom and human self are directly related to each other in this way: history is the temporal context within which human subjects can become human subjects through their freedom of will and freedom of choice. Because (as I have already argued in my previous chapter) history is only human history, in order to fully understand the Kierkegaardian concept of history, we must first fully understand how the human self becomes a self. The will is the active historical agent here. Nature, animals, destiny, lack a conscious will and so lack the ability of being active historical agents.

### Eternity, God and despair

The problem of the eternal, however, still remains. If human beings can create themselves and their history purely by using their freedom of will and their freedom of choice, how can we understand Kierkegaard's statement that every human self is grounded in God? I argue that Kierkegaard's latter claim does not contradict his previous one regarding humans' free will and free

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<sup>91</sup> C. Stephen Evans also argues in favour of the above mentioned connection between the becoming of the self and history: 'There is no question that the *emphasis* of Kierkegaard's writings is on selfhood as an achievement, something I must strive to become...[T]hrough choice the ethical individual can acquire an identity, can become someone who is capable of enduring and having a history.' C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), p. 265. (The italics in this quotation belong to the original text).

What separates my approach from that of Evans is that I believe that the stress should be on the historical nature of the Kierkegaardian Self and not on its ethical aspect. Although I do also recognise the ethical orientation of Kierkegaard's writings on selfhood, I argue that the creation of our-selves point primarily to history and then point to an ethical creation of a certain identity. In other words, I argue that the self as an ethical identity is grounded in the historical self. Even when we make choices based on our aesthetic evaluation for example, we still create our historical self, without needing to create a specific ethical identity.

choice.<sup>92</sup> Kierkegaard starts from something that he considers an undisputable fact of life, i.e. the existence of despair in the sphere of human existence. For Kierkegaard every human being despairs (at some point in her life or continuously). Kierkegaard starts from this fact of human despair and argues that this despair is a direct (or indirect) indication of the denial of human beings to freely ground their selves in God. I need to point out here the two most important elements of this Kierkegaardian claim: a) human beings have the absolute freedom to ground or not ground themselves in God and b) the necessary existential implication of the denial by human beings to ground themselves in God is despair.

In this way the necessity of completing ourselves as human beings by grounding our selves in God is not an absolute one. We can turn our backs on God, we do have this freedom. What makes this grounding necessary is the fact that we cannot avoid despair if we freely choose to deny grounding ourselves in God.

God then plays no active role in our decision, for human beings have the absolute initiative to create ourselves. The necessity of grounding ourselves in God is part of the task of completing ourselves. Such necessity is once again existential, not logical. Human beings in history remain nevertheless entirely free to create themselves through their free will and their free choice without needing to obey any kind of necessity. In fact, Kierkegaard can also point out that we are free human subjects because we can deny even God. It is not

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<sup>92</sup> As I intend to fully analyse Kierkegaard's approach to despair further on, I will have the opportunity to fully explain there Kierkegaard's statements regarding God's role in the creation of human self. I will try to simply define here the main characteristics of the Kierkegaardian analysis of despair.

God that chooses us, it is individual human beings who choose (or do not choose) their completion by choosing God.

For a matter of philosophical justice I must cite here Harry S. Broudy's claim that: 'It is not the Absolute which chooses through the individual, but rather, the individual becomes absolute through his own choice.'<sup>93</sup> Broudy also points out the individual freedom for grounding or not grounding our selves in God (the Absolute). Broudy however does not make the philosophical connection between human historical primacy and the choice of the 'Absolute'. I argue that Kierkegaard can define human historical activity as absolutely free and at the same time can claim that we cannot complete our historical existences unless we freely choose God. There is no contradiction here between human historical primacy and the 'Absolute'. Despair is the existential proof for Kierkegaard for: a) our need, if we want to complete our historical selves, to ground ourselves in God and b) our absolute freedom of going against this need.

Kierkegaard regards human beings as (partly at least) spirits and thus he considers men to possess an eternal or spiritual dimension. Humans are, however, free historical agents who have the absolute power to choose to create our selves in any given way. The fact that for Kierkegaard we are not complete selves unless we ground ourselves in God does not contradict our historical freedom, on the contrary, this fact absolutely testifies for our power to defy even this 'ultimate' necessity.

For Kierkegaard we, human beings, cannot escape the specific structure of our selves, which is necessarily and always a union of necessity and freedom,

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<sup>93</sup> Harry S. Broudy, 'Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (March, 1941), p. 302.

the temporal and the eternal, necessarily and always grounded in God. Kierkegaard states quite clearly in *SD* that we have one and only one way (necessarily) to become genuine selves without despair:

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. (*SD*, 14).

We have the freedom to live either with or without despair. We do not possess, however, the freedom to avoid despair, if we (freely) choose not to 'rest transparently' in God. The existence of despair is the proof of our spiritual dimension, in the same way as the existence of anxiety is the proof of our freedom of will and our freedom of choice. Kierkegaard asserts the meaning and the significance of anxiety from the very beginning of *CA*: '[A]nxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility.' (*CA*, 42).

This anxiety is the only possible sign of the existence within us of any kind of personal freedom. This 'freedom' can be given only through personal choices, because, for Kierkegaard, our life is our choices (even if we choose not to make choices). But this freedom to choose or even the ability to make such choices is always presented to us with anxiety.<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, the problem of Kierkegaard's conflicting statements on the nature of freedom and necessity in *PF*, *CA* and *SD* can be solved only if we consider these statements to refer to different kinds of freedom and necessity.

If, also, we can understand the relation between temporality and eternity in *PF*

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<sup>94</sup> Paul L. Holmer gives us a quite lucid picture of Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to the matter of the (free) choices a human being must take if she wants to be a complete person in his article: 'Kierkegaard and Ethical Theory', *Ethics*, Vol. 63, No. 3, Part 1 (Apr., 1953), PP. 157-170. Holmer however does not follow at all the philosophical implications of Kierkegaard's approach to the problem of free choice regarding history and the historical.

and *CA* and *SD* the way I propose, then Kierkegaard is coherent. More than this, if we decide to understand Kierkegaard's claims about freedom, necessity, the eternal and the temporal in *CA* and *SD* the way I propose to understand them, then we can also acquire a deeper understanding of Kierkegaard's concept of history.

### Anxiety

Having argued why I believe *CA* and *SD* to be crucial texts for the understanding of the Kierkegaardian concept of history, I will continue my analysis by focusing specifically, first, on the way in which Kierkegaard depicts anxiety in *CA* and, second, in the way in which Kierkegaard structures human self in *SD*. In this way we can unfold in its full exposition the historical dimension of freedom and the human self.

Anxiety, for Kierkegaard, is the only sign of freedom humans can have. Hence, for Kierkegaard, only the existential analysis of anxiety can disclose the full historical role of freedom in people's lives. Under these terms, the analysis of anxiety is crucial for the analysis of the Kierkegaardian Self and consequently for the analysis of the Kierkegaardian approach to history.

In their introduction to *CA*, the Hongs emphasise the significance of the experience of anxiety for the existence of individual freedom: 'If the individual did not have some measure of freedom, there could be no experience of anxiety.' (*CA*, xvii). My aim will be to define further the nature of this 'individual freedom' and to give my reasons for connecting it directly to the Kierkegaardian concept of history.

In his own introduction to *CA*, Kierkegaard restates one of the most fundamental assertions from the 'Interlude': 'In logic, no movement must come

about, for logic is, and whatever is logical only is.’ (CA, 13). Logical necessity cannot (by definition) apply to time (historical existence), because logic lacks temporality. In the footnote that expands on his argument, Kierkegaard refers to Eleatics: ‘The eternal expression for the logical is what the Eleatics through a misunderstanding transferred to existence: nothing comes into being, everything is.’ (CA, 13).<sup>95</sup>

From the beginning of CA, Kierkegaard makes clear the kind of ‘eternity’ that cannot be found within the realm of temporality (i.e. existence): logical eternity. Specifically, he is referring to Hegel and his followers, who believe that through logical analysis, can one understand everything, even existence. Kierkegaard refers directly to Hegel<sup>96</sup> and argues that: ‘neither logic nor actuality is served by placing actuality in the *Logic*. Actuality is not served thereby, for contingency, which is an essential part of the actual, cannot be admitted within the realm of logic.’ (CA, 10). Such ‘contingency’, as Kierkegaard argues in the ‘Interlude’, provides the necessary background for the existence of freedom.

The Hongs argue that Kierkegaard maintains that: ‘actuality comprises the accidental...Kierkegaard’s position allows for freedom, which belongs in the realm of actuality.’ (CA, 224). Yet, the problem remains unsolved: what exactly is the nature of this freedom? Is it simply the undetermined factor of arbitrary historical facts?

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<sup>95</sup> Kierkegaard here alludes to the Hegelian logic. I will explain Kierkegaard’s opposition to the Hegelian notion of logic in my next chapter. Here it is enough for me to refer to my previous chapter and to what I explained there regarding Kierkegaard’s position on the nature of logic. Kierkegaard continues in CA to argue that logic and theoretical understanding is not part of existence and at the same time he continues arguing that within the sphere of human existence will is what matters and not knowledge.

<sup>96</sup> He refers to ‘an author [who] entitles the last section of the *Logic* “Actuality”.’ (CA, 9).

Kierkegaard provides a helpful way to get to grips with this 'freedom' in CA. He begins his analysis of anxiety by referring to sin. The connection is quite obvious but at the same time indicative of the possible nature of freedom: we can sin only because we have the freedom (of will and choice) to do so. We are free to commit sinful acts thus we can freely sin. Without the actual individual ability of free will and free choice there could be no sin. The presupposition of such a capacity to sin is the existence of personal responsibility. We need to be able to be held responsible for our choices in order to sin.

Freedom is the necessary precondition of sin. And as sin is human, freedom here refers to human freedom of will and choice. I keep referring to freedom of choice along with freedom of will. The reason is simple: we can be free to will without being free to make a choice. The latter is not a necessary implication of the first, neither *vice versa*. I can will as long as I want to have wings but I cannot make such choice, because such choice is not among my existing choices. I can have freedom to choose between multiple choices without necessarily willing to do so.

Whereas freedom of will and freedom of choice are usually interconnected, they are two different and distinct freedoms. Kierkegaard does not bother himself to distinguish them. That is, Kierkegaard usually labels as 'freedom' both freedom of will and freedom of choice. The fact, however, remains, that the first one does not necessitate the latter, neither *vice versa*.

What, however, is crucial for our analysis, is that anxiety is a sign of both freedom of will and freedom of choice. Kierkegaard points out that, for him,

whenever one needs to will something or one needs to make a choice, anxiety appears.

Hence, Kierkegaard goes on to argue that sin can only occur if we personally make a 'bad' use of our freedom, because human nature has two specific attributes: freedom of will and freedom of choice.<sup>97</sup>

Kierkegaard thus argues against all those who either consider human race in its entirety to be in a state of sin (without leaving any possibility of personal responsibility) owing to Adam's first sin or believe that sin can be determined by general and abstract thought, this is the case for those who believe that sin is simply lack of knowledge of good.<sup>98</sup>

'If ethics is to include sin, its ideality comes to an end.' (CA, 17-18).  
'*Hereditary sin* makes everything still more desperate...' (CA, 19).<sup>99</sup> 'As all ancient knowledge and speculation was based on the presupposition that

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<sup>97</sup> Libuse Lukas Miller makes an interesting remark regarding sin and freedom in human beings: 'The task Kierkegaard set himself, then, was to define and describe that property or attribute of human nature, of the human psychological structure, out of which sin could appear as the "qualitative leap", that is to say, not by a casual necessity, as if the sin were already inherent or immanent in the antecedent condition, but by a sort of "bad" freedom, or free "fall", so that the sin appears as the new or emergent quality, not predictable and not determined in terms of the antecedent condition alone.' Libuse Lucas Miller, *In search of the Self*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 230.

Miller then also points out the basic human freedom to act freely. What he lacks is the stress on the historical aspects of this freedom. For Kierkegaard (as I intend to depict in this chapter), history's nature is the actualisation in spatio-temporal conditions of this basic freedom of will and choice.

<sup>98</sup> Michelle Kosch also points out that Kierkegaard wants to argue against the necessity or universality of sin: 'The central claim of the introduction [to CA]...looks like a claim to the effect that the necessity or universality of sin undermines the validity of ethical standpoint...Ethic points to ideality as a task and assumes that every man possesses the requisite conditions. Thus ethic develops a contradiction...' Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 160. I do agree with Kosch in that Kierkegaard here wants to undermine the universality of sin, but I claim that Kosch fails short in understanding the whole Kierkegaardian argument here, which is not directed solely against ethics but is opposing any possibility of not recognising the individual responsibility for the relevant individual choices. Kierkegaard claims here that we cannot hold responsible Adam for our sins and we cannot also try to relate sin with knowledge or the lack of it. Sin, freedom of will and choice and responsibility refer not to theoretical contemplations or to an inherited choice of Adam, they create instead an inseparable nexus of individual historical human existence.

<sup>99</sup> The italics belong to the original text.



thought has reality, so all ancient ethics was based on the presupposition that virtue can be realized.’ (CA, 19).

Kierkegaard argues that, while ethics is a theoretical system of normative maxims concerning what people should do and what people should not do, sin is an existential individual responsibility. Hence, if ethics want to include sin, then ethics cannot any more remain a purely theoretical system. Sin directly opposes any theoretical and normative abstraction.

Kierkegaard also, points out that Socrates, who claims that sin is lack of knowledge, or Aristotle, who claims that virtue can be taught, ground their ethics in the presupposition that ‘thought has reality’. That is, they make the mistake that Kierkegaard has already pointed out in *JC*, in *PF* and in *CUP*: they put logical necessity within actuality. In this way, however, they also make the mistake of bringing the necessity of theoretical knowledge in the actuality of sin.

Kierkegaard then, wants to distinguish sin from: a) Adam’s sin and b) sin as lack of knowledge. Anxiety for him can give us a different understanding of sin, which moves away from both ancient ethics and traditional Christian dogmatics.

From his introduction onwards, Kierkegaard is clear: ‘The present work has set as its task the psychological treatment of the concept of “anxiety”...Accordingly, it must also...deal with the concept of sin.’ (CA, 14).

Kierkegaard also states that: ‘The mood of psychology is that of discovering anxiety, and in its anxiety psychology portrays sin, while again and again it is in anxiety over the portrayal that it itself brings forth.’ (CA, 15).

Sin and anxiety correspond to each other. Anxiety signifies sin and sin can be signified psychologically only through the 'persistent observation' of anxiety. Both of them are a positive sign of freedom. This freedom is personal and a matter of will and responsibility. Kierkegaard creates a single existential 'nexus' that is constituted by anxiety, sin, freedom, will and responsibility.

The concept of history appears early in Kierkegaard's *CA*:

Every individual is essentially interested in the history of all other individuals, and just as essentially as in his own. Perfection in oneself is therefore the perfect participation in the whole. (*CA*, 29).

What is important here is not just simply the mention of the word 'history'. Rather, it is Kierkegaard's focus, on the one hand, on an individual's history, and, on the other, on the relation between individuals. The historical agent is not the race, the nation nor the state but the 'individual'. Even when Kierkegaard refers to the 'whole', it is a whole made up of 'individuals'. At the same time however, Kierkegaard is insistent that history is not only the history of one individual. On the contrary, he argues that 'individual' perfection can be reached only through 'perfect participation' in the whole. The 'whole' here signifies simply the totality of human historical subjects without (like Hegel) prioritising this totality over individual historical existence. Humanity (not as an empty conceptual abstraction, but as the concrete sum of existing human beings) and individuals exist together in history:

No individual is indifferent to the history of the race any more than the race is indifferent to the history of the individual. As the history of the race moves on, the individual begins constantly anew,

because he is both himself and the race, and by this, in turn, the history of the race. (CA, 29).

This 'race' cannot be understood as something that surpasses individuality. The history of the race is comprised of every single individual. Kierkegaard stresses the historical importance of every single individual in contrast to the Hegelian stress on the state or the nation. What is more, Kierkegaard here alludes to a key aspect of my analysis: central historical agent is not a totality (like state or nation or societies); rather, individuals are the 'bricks' of history.

Does 'individual' refer to the human self? And if so, what is this 'historicality' of human selves? Kierkegaard will give us the answer in *SD* (and I will return to this at length), but at this point it is useful to focus on the way an individual can be a historical self. Personal development through history and capacity for transformation are the main historical characteristics of every individual who wants to acquire a self. As Kierkegaard will argue, to be a self is a task that can be accomplished only in history.<sup>100</sup>

#### Possibility as anxiety

'Anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility.' (CA, 42). Kierkegaard writes, (and in so doing he brings us back to the concept of freedom). To be anxious is to have in front of us all of our future possible options. And what actualises this freedom of choice of ours is simply our will

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<sup>100</sup> Edward F. Mooney also points out how Kierkegaard understands the 'transformation' of an individual to a human self: 'If persons are selves, then perhaps self is something that develops through stages—a common thread, winding through, and thereby linking transformations.' Edward F. Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 91. I agree with Mooney's point here that for Kierkegaard every individual is not *de facto* a self. What however Mooney defines as 'stages' I argue they are wholly 'historical' ones and not simply 'psychological'. Kierkegaard's transformation of an individual to a 'self' is always a historical task, an existential effort through time and space to create a self. The selves in 'discord and resolve' are always historical selves and their effort to transform themselves is always a (free) historical activity.

to choose one of them. Anxiety then denotes our freedom to have many different options in front of us and the 'qualitative leap [that] stands outside of all ambiguity' is our actualised freedom of will and freedom of choice that brings into actuality (and thus into history) one and only one option. Ambiguity refers to the free and still undefined future, and the leap refers to the present decision. This leap can take place only within history. In fact, this is the history we make through the actualisation of our freedom of will and our freedom of choice.

Jean-Paul Sartre offers the following helpful characterization of anxiety: 'Kierkegaard describing anguish [anxiety] before the sin characterizes it as anguish [anxiety] in the face of freedom.'<sup>101</sup> Sartre continues his analysis by arguing that this freedom is freedom of choice between many different options.<sup>102</sup>

#### Anxiety as the result of a synthesis

Kierkegaard defines man as a 'synthesis' of two different dimensions (psychical and physical). The two members of this synthesis are united in a third dimension, i.e. spirit. Psychical refers to our emotions. Physical refers to our body. Spirit is our self-consciousness. The first sign of this 'glue' between

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<sup>101</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 53.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 53-55, where Sartre compares the Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety to the Heideggerian concept of anxiety and he takes the side of Kierkegaard.

Edward Harris refers to this 'freedom' as 'Freedom [that] can be interpreted as an expression for "self-activation"'. Harris abstracts three theses, in Kierkegaard's view of the potentials for self-disclosing. The second and the third one are the most important for my argument: 'Thesis (ii): self-activation is a potential for self-disclosing....Thesis (iii):self-creation is a potential for self-disclosing. What is important to clarify is exactly that human self is created (thus can be created) through this freedom to act. Self-activation is the actualisation of our freedom of will and self-creation is the choices we make. 'Self-disclosing' then can be understood in this context as the possibility human beings have to freely actualise part of their potentiality. When we make choices that we will to make, we freely 'disclose' our potentiality by making it historical actuality. Edward Harris, *Man's Ontological Predicament*, (Uppsala, Stockholm, Sweden: LiberTryck, 1984), p. 32.

physical and psychical is anxiety. 'How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety.' (CA, 44). The first sign then of self-consciousness is anxiety. But in order for someone to acquire self-consciousness, he has to first have a self. Spirit is then the (necessary) beginning (in time, thus in history) of selfhood. This (necessarily) means that anxiety is the (historical) first sign of selfhood.

To have history means to have self-consciousness. The actualisation of spirit is the beginning of history for human beings. When Kierkegaard states that: '...without sin there is no sexuality, and without sexuality, no history.' (CA, 49), he makes a direct and clear connection between self-consciousness (spirit) and history. And this is because Kierkegaard argues that what makes a man a man is his sexuality, which launches his self-consciousness. Without sexuality man lacks self-consciousness and thus 'neither is he really man.' (CA, 49). Angels are not sexualised, but angels also have no history. (CA, 49).

It is out of this passage that emerges the first definition of freedom in terms of anxiety: 'anxiety...is entangled freedom.' (CA, 49). This 'entangled' freedom has nothing to do with logical presuppositions or arbitrary actions. This freedom refers to the 'possibility of being able'. Kierkegaard states quite emphatically that: 'The possibility is to be able.' (CA, 49). This ability is freedom of will and freedom of choice and can only be experienced personally.

Each individual can understand on her own terms how this freedom occurs: 'How sin came into the world, each man understands solely by himself.' (CA, 51). As we have already argued, sin, for Kierkegaard, can be brought out only by anxiety. Anxiety is the beginning of selfhood and history through the

actualisation of desire (sexuality) and spirit (self-consciousness). This actualisation can take place (in history) only through an 'entangled freedom', which is neither a logical category nor an arbitrary action.

Such a personal experience of entangled freedom cannot be explained by science (logic). As Kierkegaard puts it: '...sin is no scientific problem...' (CA, 51). This is the beginnings of a Kierkegaardian theory of history.<sup>103</sup>

Sin and anxiety become more intertwined as Kierkegaard continues his analysis in CA: 'Sin entered in anxiety, but sin in turn brought anxiety along with it.' (CA, 53). While one might expect anxiety to be broader than sin because anxiety is the general feeling of freedom and sin a particular actualisation of this freedom, here Kierkegaard points out that sin can also bring about anxiety.

Kierkegaard defines anxiety in two ways. What is crucial is the temporal aspect of both definitions:

Consequently, anxiety means two things: the anxiety in which the individual posits sin by the qualitative leap, and the anxiety that entered in and enters in with sin, and that also, accordingly, enters quantitatively into the world every time an individual posits sin. (CA, 54).

In both instances, anxiety occurs in the temporal world and is brought about by a 'leap', i.e. by personal freedom. Anxiety, therefore, is a form of personal

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<sup>103</sup> Herman Diem refers not to 'historical self' but to the 'individual ego': 'For Kierkegaard its object is the individual ego, which must be set free for effective action based on its own private existence.' Herman Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence*, translated by Harold Knight, (Connecticut, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1959), p. 41.

Diem's however 'individual ego' refers more to a 'psychological' ego and less to a historical self. Kierkegaard however refers again and again to 'self' and 'ego' after Freud is a rather psychological unit. Besides that, Diem seems to understand human freedom more as a psychological aspect of human beings and less as an existential foundation of human selves.

freedom: 'anxiety is the dizziness of freedom...In anxiety there is the selfish infinity of possibility...' (CA, 61). Personal responsibility is the immediate effect of the actualisation of human capacity within time.<sup>104</sup>

Although this 'creation' of our selves in history and the simultaneous 'creation' of personal history seem to be directed always to our present and to our future, our past plays an equal role, even for our future choices. As we will see in more details in my analysis of *SD*, our past choices along with our past given conditions of our life, generate the necessary context within which we make our present and future choices. To choose, we need first to understand that there is only one way to have a self without despair, that is, to accept the responsibility of our given conditions. To possess a history means possessing the freedom to make one. Personal responsibility is the burden we have to bear if we want to freely create our selves and our history. Not to have this responsibility would mean that we were not yet complete human beings.

The spiritual dimension of the historical (temporal) human subject can be actualised only through freedom and responsibility. This freedom is 'entangled' freedom. The necessity of this freedom (in contrast with the total contradiction of freedom to necessity in *PF*), is that: 'Man is determined in his

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<sup>104</sup> George J. Stack holds a similar position when he states that: 'By coming to know the actual self as far as this is possible, one accepts responsibility for what one has been.' George J. Stack, 'Kierkegaard: The Self and Ethical Existence', *Ethics*, Vol. 83, No. 2, (Jan., 1973), p.109. My difference from Stack's claim is that I consider this responsibility to be first a historical activity (in terms not only of happening in history but in terms of creating history) and then an ethical one. For Kierkegaard ethics can mean only a personal willful and responsible attitude which characterizes first the historical task of becoming a self and then an ethical behaviour. This is why Kierkegaard in *CUP* speaks again and again about the need for individuals to acquire a more personally engaged behaviour. Ethics as a system and the 'ethical self' are for Kierkegaard vague abstractions. Personal choices signify for him our will to become something that we will and thus we are responsible for. Stack in fact seems to recognise the historical nature of this 'ethical self' when in the same page claims that: 'The self is consolidated in and through resolute choice and a repeated attempt to achieve as much consistency in one's life as is possible to gain a history.'

being, but determining in his becoming.’<sup>105</sup> The ‘determined’ being of man is his ‘existential’ necessity. As Kierkegaard argues: ‘Each individual begins in an historical nexus, and the consequences of nature still hold true.’ (CA, 73).

Despite such necessity, science (logical analysis) can never help us explain our historical selfhood:

Although in the newer science sin has so often been explained as selfishness, it is incomprehensible that it has not been recognized that precisely here lies the difficulty of finding a place for its explanation in any science. For selfishness is precisely the particular, and what this signifies only the single individual can know as the single individual, because when it is viewed under universal categories it may signify everything in such a way that it signifies nothing at all...If a person does not first make clear to himself the meaning of “self,” it is of no use to say of sin that it is selfishness. (CA, pp.77-78).

There are two very important Kierkegaardian theses contained in the above quotation: a) Logic cannot explain the self and b) only we can understand ourselves. Kierkegaard argues that when it comes to personal experience, general or abstract or ‘universal’ categories explain nothing. They are too vague and too general to grasp personal experience. In *PF* Kierkegaard argues that the same happens in relation to the existent (temporal) world, because freedom disrupts logical analysis. Becoming someone, which means acquiring a self in history, cannot be explained by logical categories or scientific causal prediction. The only necessities we can find in ‘becoming’ are

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<sup>105</sup> George J. Stack, (1973), p. 116.



the given natural and social conditions. But even these conditions can be transcended through our personal freedom of will and choice.

'Becoming' always refers to the actuality (or reality, because Kierkegaard uses both terms synonymously). In the Interlude he argues that logic is inapplicable to transition. The same point is made in CA:

Transition belongs in the sphere of historical freedom, for transition is *a state* and it is actual...Therefore, when Aristotle says that the transition from possibility to actuality is *a κίνησις* [movement], it is not to be understood logically but with reference to historical freedom. (CA, 82).

Freedom of will and freedom of choice enable man to acquire a self by 'becoming' a self within history.

#### Eternity and moment

This returns us to a central problem in this chapter: how is the dimension of the eternal to be incorporated into the self and thus into history? We must begin with the 'moment'. As Kierkegaard states:

In the individual life, anxiety is the moment—to use a new expression that says the same as was said in the previous discussion, but that also points toward that which follows. (CA, 81).

What exactly is this moment and why is important for our analysis of the Kierkegaardian concept of history? Here is, Kierkegaard's definition:

Only with the moment does history begin...The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of temporality posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time. (CA, 89).

Without the moment, there is no history for Kierkegaard. Without the moment, there is no time. At the same time, through the moment, time incorporates eternity. The analysis of the moment, then, is central to the understanding of the Kierkegaardian concept of history.

In order to bring out his own understanding of the moment, Kierkegaard first presents Plato's interpretation. He argues that Plato '...conceives of the moment as purely abstract.' (CA, 82). He further states that: 'Greek philosophy and the modern alike maintain that everything turns on bringing non-being into being...' (CA, 83). The Christian view is similar: 'Christian view takes the position that non-being is present everywhere...as the temporal forgotten by the eternal.' (CA, 83). In this way eternity and time are ineluctably separated. Kierkegaard's position however is the converse: man is 'a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal.' (CA, 85).

The moment can therefore provide some guidance to the reasons why in *PF* Kierkegaard speaks of a separation of the temporal (historical) from the eternal, while in *CA* he defines the historical human subject as the active union of the eternal and the temporal. Let me reconstruct Kierkegaard's argument on the nature of the moment:

- a) Man can be described as a synthesis of psyche and body but also as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. (CA, 85).
- b) In the first description, spirit is the third factor which unifies body and psyche. In the second however there appears to be no third factor. If

there is no third factor, we cannot speak of a synthesis but only of a contradiction. (CA, 85).<sup>106</sup>

- c) We can speak of a synthesis only if we understand time 'mixing' together with the eternal in the 'moment'. In this case, time is not an infinite succession, but is something that includes the moment as its unifying factor with eternity. (CA, 85-86).
- d) In this way, time and eternity 'touch each other' in the moment. (CA, 87).
- e) The moment then, is not an atom of time but an atom of eternity; (CA, 88).
- f) 'The synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is not another synthesis but it is the expression for the first synthesis, according to which man is a synthesis of psyche and body that is sustained by spirit. (CA, 88). And so
- g) 'As soon as the spirit is posited, the moment is present'. (CA, 88).

Let me begin with the conclusion to this argument: Kierkegaard regards spirit as related to the moment. Spirit (human self-consciousness) posits itself and by this position the moment is made present. History then cannot begin without the positing of spirit and the presence of the moment. In other words, whenever we make a decision, spirit is posited, the moment is present and

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<sup>106</sup> Kierkegaard here with these specific terms refers to 'body' as the material body we have, to 'psyche' as the totality of our emotions (including our desires and our natural appetites). 'Spirit' (as I have argued and I will continue arguing) is self-consciousness, 'temporal' is our temporal actuality (our existence within time) and 'eternal' is the exact opposition to temporal, that which lacks completely temporality. Kierkegaard introduces these terms without a further clarification, but (as I try to depict and analyse in this chapter) through his analysis in *SD* he gives us his own definitions. 'Body', 'psyche', and 'temporal' present us with no problems regarding their definitions. Kierkegaard tries to define in his own way 'eternal' and 'spirit' but he does not want to stay in definitions. He wants instead, to explain to his readers the specific characteristics of these terms through a laborious argumentation.

history is made. The moment then signifies the 'leap' which creates history through personal freedom of will and choice.<sup>107</sup>

If: a) time is defined as an infinite succession and

b) the moment is another conceptual abstraction, then

c) the eternal and the temporal cannot exist together and

d) the present has no existence at all, which means the only means of grasping history is as time passing by (the Hegelian view of history).

If, on the contrary:

a) time can be 'pervaded' by eternal

b) in the moment, then

c) time comprises present time, past time and future time.

The 'moment' is another expression for the 'leap', which in turn signifies the actualisation in temporality of our freedom of will and choice. This 'moment' differs from Plato's, Hegel's and even the traditional Christian's moment in that it is interpreted as the incision in time (as passing by) of eternity which creates temporality and thus creates history.

This moment is an atom of eternity as long as it is grounded in our eternal (and thus necessary) structure of selfhood. We, human beings, have only one way to fully actualise our selves, and this is when we self-consciously and freely relate ourselves to God. This is what Kierkegaard argues for in *SD*. It also forms part of Kierkegaard's argument in *CA*.

The great advantage, for Kierkegaard, of his own definition of the moment, is that it really makes room for the past, present and future; and so allows us to relate as selves with a past, present and future. As Kierkegaard puts it: 'the

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<sup>107</sup> As we shall see during the analysis of *SD*, Kierkegaard directly defines spirit (self-consciousness) and the moment (the 'leap' of decision) as the crucial factors of the creation of the historical self.

future is the whole of which the past is a part...The moment and the future in turn posit the past...the future in turn is the eternal's (freedom's) possibility in the individuality expressed as anxiety.' (CA, 89-91).

If time is understood as mere 'passing by', there is no room for a separate past, present and future. In the moment (i.e. every time we freely make a decision), there is, however. We relate ourselves to our past experience; we use our historical knowledge to take a present decision, which will shape our future.

In this Kierkegaardian time, the future is the most important dimension:

The possible corresponds exactly to the future. For freedom, the possible is the future, and the future is for time the possible. To both of these corresponds anxiety in the individual life. An accurate and correct linguistic usage therefore associates anxiety and the future. (CA, 91).

Only by understanding ourselves in terms of our future decisions can we really grasp ourselves as historical subjects. To grasp ourselves thus is to grasp ourselves as free historical agents, as free human selves:

In turning inward, he discovers freedom. He does not fear fate, for he lays hold of no outward task, and freedom is for him his bliss, not freedom to do this or that in the world, to become king and emperor or an abusive street corner orator, but freedom to know of himself that he is freedom. (CA, 108).

To make a choice is a leap. This is something that Kierkegaard continually stresses: 'The history of the individual life proceeds in a movement from state to state. Every state is posited by a leap.' (CA, 113). And what is more, the

moment can be understood only through individual, personal introspection. As Kierkegaard argues:

If any observer will only pay attention to himself, he will have enough with five men, five women, and ten children for the discovery of all possible states of the human soul... [T]ruth is for the particular individual only as he himself produces it in action. (CA, 126, 138).

It is action that gives rise to an actual understanding of experiencing ourselves as free human subjects. Only when we act can we experience ourselves as the particular synthesis we are. The anxiety we experience in the face of every single decision we make, is the only verification of our (free) nature as human beings. 'If a human being were a beast or an angel, he could not be in anxiety. Because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety; and the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man...' (CA, 155).

What really makes us human beings is our free (historical) action. Our self-consciousness as free historical agents is something totally concrete, with no relation at all to any kind of theoretical contemplation.<sup>108</sup>

The most concrete content that consciousness can have is consciousness of itself, of the individual himself—not the pure self-consciousness, but the self consciousness that is so concrete that no author, not even the one with the greatest power of description, has ever been able to describe such self-consciousness, although every single human being is such one. This self-consciousness is not contemplation, for he who believes this has not understood

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<sup>108</sup> Theoretical contemplation can be an 'actual' thus historical activity. We cannot however, for Kierkegaard, consider abstracted logical explanation, as the proper 'instrument' of creating or understanding history.

himself, because he sees that meanwhile he himself is in the process of becoming and consequently cannot be something completed for contemplation. This self-consciousness, therefore, is action, and this action is in turn inwardness... (CA, 143).<sup>109</sup>

Eternity presents itself as the 'ought to be' that nevertheless leaves every human being with the responsibility of actualising her own freedom. As James Collins argues, the human being 'is a temporal being whose spiritual center impels him toward eternity.'<sup>110</sup> This 'ought to be' however, that has the form of a necessary structure of human self, must be personally and willingly actualised. 'It requires a leap, a free intervention of the will, a practical insertion into existence at the point of its intersection with eternity.'<sup>111</sup>

### Despair

'[T]here is not one single living human being who does not despair a little...' (SD, 22). Kierkegaard considers despair to be a general characteristic of being human, a fundamental feature of the human self: '...despairing lies in man himself...And because the relation is spirit, is the self, upon it rests the responsibility for all despair at every moment of its existence...' (SD, 16).

Despair, moreover, is proof that we are spirits and we relate to the eternal. '[T]o despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man.' (SD, 17). Just as anxiety is proof of the existence of our personal freedom of will and choice, so despair is proof that we are (partly) spirits participating in the eternal. The despair to which participation in eternity gives rise forms a task,

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<sup>109</sup> I have made such extended quotation only because here we can clearly view Kierkegaard's very definition of the connection between concrete individual action and self-consciousness.

<sup>110</sup> James Collins, 'Faith and Reflection in Kierkegaard', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Jan., 1957), p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

to complete ourselves as free human subjects (selves) who ground our selfhood in God.

If there were nothing eternal in a man, he could not despair at all;...[E]ternity nevertheless will make it manifest that his condition was despair and will nail him to himself so that his torment will still be that he cannot rid himself of his self, and it will become obvious that he was just imagining that he had succeeded in doing so. Eternity is obliged to do this, because to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest concession, an infinite concession, given to man, but it is also eternity's claim upon him. (*SD*, 21).

Anxiety refers to possibility; so does despair. 'Every actual moment of despair is traceable to possibility;' (*SD*, 17). This possibility is our freedom. The fact that our selfhood can only take one form constitutes necessity. 'A person cannot rid himself of the relation to himself any more than he can rid himself of his self, which after all, is one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to oneself.' (*SD*, 17).

Within time, thus within the realm of existence and history, human beings both actualise their freedom and understand themselves as something 'composite'. History then is to be made out of the task of choosing ourselves. Necessity and freedom, the temporal and the eternal are, as I have made clear in this chapter, essential elements of our historical selfhood.

If we, as human existing beings, had solely temporal characteristics, despair would never occur as such 'persistent companion' to our lives. Our actuality would be defined through a permanent present within which past and future would have no reality. Our temporal actuality thus would be dimensionless.



Kierkegaard starts from the fact that we do not experience time in this way. He explains the reason why by focusing on the 'moment' of decision which continuously assimilates what lies beyond time, i.e. the eternal.<sup>112</sup>

This 'continuous assimilation of what lies beyond it' is spirit, which at every moment, and with every decision we make creates our individuality, creates our historical selves. Actuality therefore constituted through the participation of our self-consciousness (our spirituality) in eternity. This self-consciousness is spirit because, for Kierkegaard, we have a self only if we relate it to God, who sustains our 'synthesis'. We cannot be temporal beings without being at the same time eternal beings. That is, whenever we find ourselves living in the historical (actual) present, we realise (or we should realise) our eternal dimension, through our spiritual (self-conscious) development.

There is an ongoing interplay here between necessity and freedom. To be a self is defined simultaneously by the necessity of our need to freely ground ourselves in God (if we want to live without despair) and by the freedom that renders us able to make decisions in the 'moment'. In *SD* such interplay provides the basis for a full interpretation of the Kierkegaardian concept of history. In *PF* Kierkegaard had proposed the basis of this concept, in *CA* he goes on to name its key features, but it is in *SD* that Kierkegaard finally describes his concept of history fully, i.e. history as the active unification of freedom and necessity, the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite.

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<sup>112</sup> For a similar approach see: Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the critique of modernity, Søren Kierkegaard's religious psychology*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 123: 'Actuality, that is to say, in becoming itself, in establishing itself as actual, draws into itself the elements of non-existence which lie on either side of its specific 'range', while simultaneously resisting the temptation to empty itself into either of its component elements. And the task of existence is to develop, through the continuous assimilation of what lies beyond it, the specific characteristics of individuality.'

My only problem with Ferguson's approach is that I argue that this specific way to exist and being selves is not a matter of a 'religious psychology' but a direct ontological—existential characteristic of being selves in history.

We must not however understand Kierkegaard's structure of the self as a 'platonic' construction. Harvey Albert Smit is right to underline that:

In this first anthropological conception, man is not seen as a being who combines within himself two worlds in both of which he is a member (as in Platonism). Rather man is the real, concrete existence between abstract and unreal poles. Man must become spirit, and spirit is the third factor which unites the "soulish and the bodily". Spirit is essentially human activity, human freedom, self-creative choice....Spirit is thus what man becomes when he truly exists in the freedom of self-choice and self-determination.<sup>113</sup>

History is the concrete product of the individual's self-creation. At stake in this self-creation are, as we have seen, the interplay of freedom and necessity and in *SD*, Kierkegaard is at his most lucid concerning the nature of freedom and the nature of necessity.

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. (*SD*, 14).<sup>114</sup>

The following key conclusions can be reconstructed from the above statement:

- a) The self is not something that stands still; on the contrary, the self is completed through transition and continuous change.

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<sup>113</sup> Harvey Albert Smit, *Kierkegaard's pilgrimage of Man*, (Netherlands: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1965), p. 165.

<sup>114</sup> I do not argue that Kierkegaard is right when he claims this. I do argue however, that his words can give us a positive indication about the specific natures of freedom and necessity as dimensions of our (historical) existence. The reason that I quote for a second time this fragment, is because I strongly believe that here we can clear up the roles and the natures of freedom and necessity in *CA* and *SD*.

- b) Despair is something that can be 'rooted out'. Despair then, signifies a 'wrong' self-function.
- c) We can live without despair in only one way. This way is therefore necessary to the extent we wish to escape despair.
- d) The necessary way of escaping despair requires self-activation, i.e. an intention to 'rest transparently in the power that established' us (as human beings).
- e) This necessity then, 'demands' our freedom of will and our freedom of choice.

#### Existential freedom

With such conclusions in mind freedom is to be seen not as an absolute freedom, for we cannot escape despair simply by using our freedom. Rather, freedom must be utilized in a specific manner in order to escape despair. Yet, at the same time, necessity is not to be seen as absolute necessity, for we are not logically obligated to live our lives without despair. Rather, necessity here refers to something that is pre-given to us that must nevertheless be freely actualised. Again, the distinction between the meaning of freedom and necessity in *PF* and the meaning they bear in *CA* and in *SD* is crucial.

The process of actualisation occurs only within history, and, in fact, creates history. Kierkegaard's concept of history is only to be grasped, therefore, if we take into account Kierkegaard's statements on necessity, freedom and the self in the Interlude, in *CA* and in *SD*.

#### Despair and faith

Finally, in this section, it is worth flagging up in more detail the opposite of despair: faith. Milbank argues that for Kierkegaard:

The only way out of this condition is to travel to the end of despair, to discover that despair does indeed lurk beneath the indeterminate series of finite projects – and then paradoxically to invest our hope and love in infinite indeterminacy itself. A leap into the void by which faith heals anxiety.<sup>115</sup>

‘What is decisive is that with God everything is possible.’ (*SD*, 38). That is, Kierkegaard argues that, if we want to believe that we have the freedom of freely willing and choosing, then we have to believe first that ‘with God everything is possible.’ Kierkegaard continues, ‘Then the question is whether he will believe that for God everything is possible, that is, whether he will believe.’ (*SD*, 38). This faith is both faith in God (that God can give us this possibility of ‘everything is possible’) and faith in us (that we have the will and the freedom to make choices).

Nevertheless, *pace* Milbank, anxiety cannot be healed, at least not once-and-for-all. We have to learn to live with anxiety, because, in the end, anxiety can ultimately provide a helpful perspective on our freedom. We cannot heal despair with faith either, we have to try to ‘destroy’ the possibility of despair with every decision we make regarding ourselves. Thus, faith provides a mere indication of the need of self-completion that must be perpetually put into practice. Kierkegaard is not optimistic as Milbank contends about the possibility of living without despair. The full extent of his optimism is limited to the statement that ‘with God everything is possible.’

Kierkegaard argues that, besides a human self there is a ‘self directly before God.’ (*SD*, 79). Kierkegaard calls the latter self a ‘theological self’. (*SD*, 79).

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<sup>115</sup> John Milbank, ‘The Sublime in Kierkegaard’, p. 310.

The pagan and the natural man have the 'human self' as their criterion. Kierkegaard goes on to define sin as: 'before God in despair not to will to be oneself or before God in despair to will to be oneself.' (SD, 81). Kierkegaard then argues that it does not matter if we will or not to be ourselves before God, if we do so with despair, i.e. if we do not believe that 'with God everything is possible.'<sup>116</sup>

Sin is 'specifically a qualification of spirit.' (SD, 81). In other words, we can sin, because we can be selves:

In fact, the greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God. Not until a self as this specific single individual is conscious of existing before God, not until then is it the infinite self, and this self sins before God. (SD, 80).

Even sin then, can be something positive, because only when we have the ability to sin (before God), do we possess this 'theological' self (the 'greater'

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<sup>116</sup> Kierkegaard *argues* that we, human beings, do not possess the power to forgive our sins with our will. What we can do however is to freely choose to believe that God can. Simon D. Podmore argues that we can freely choose to believe and thus to accept the 'gift of forgiveness'. See: Simon D. Podmore, 'The Holy and Wholly Other: Kierkegaard on the alterity of God', *HeyJ* LII (2012), pp. 9-23. What is important for my approach is the fact that even when we choose to understand ourselves as being totally grounded in God, we are still responsible for this choice. Ultimately, God as the only ground for a completed historical human self does not take away either our freedom or our responsibility.

Being in despair can lead us to recognise our absolute responsibility for being ourselves. The act of faith in God's grace starts from our free will and ends at our self-conscious understanding of what it means to possess such free will. Simon D. Podmore analyses in an interesting way the inner relation of sin and forgiveness, and of human impossibility and divine possibility. See: Simon D. Podmore, 'Kierkegaard as Physician of the Soul: On Self-Forgiveness and Despair', *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 2009, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 174-185.

My point however is not to depict the theological dimensions of the phenomenon of despair but to explain why this phenomenon along with the phenomenon of anxiety can be used by Kierkegaard as the actual indicators of the structure of our historical self. Podmore's intention is to analyse the relation of the human self and God in terms of sin and forgiveness. My intention is to analyse the relation of human self and God in terms of human historical free and responsible will. For further details in Podmore's approach see: Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self before God, Anatomy of the Abyss*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

self as Kierkegaard calls it). God signifies the solid ground of the existence of our possibilities and thus signifies our freedom, but at the same time God signifies our personal responsibility because we 'are before God'. God then, for Kierkegaard, becomes the transcendent foundation of our historical existence. This is something to be expected, for Kierkegaard argues continuously in favour of a 'paradox', which lies at the very heart of our 'historicality'. In *PF* paradox is related to the Incarnation, in *CUP* it is about the paradox of the 'truth of subjectivity'. In *CA* and *SD* the paradox takes the form of the 'moment' and the synthesis of the human self.

This does not mean that the Kierkegaardian structure of the human self pushes anthropology to 'absurdity'. Rather, at stake here is Kierkegaard's stress on the inability of reason and logic to explain individual existence (and, in fact, any kind of human existence), because reason and logic are too abstract to comprehend the manner in which subjects exist.<sup>117</sup>

For Kierkegaard, faith constitutes the only possible attitude that can lead us away from despair and away from sin. 'Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God.' '[T]he opposite of sin is faith.' (*SD*, 82). It is so because sin has nothing to do with knowledge or lack of knowledge; sin is a matter of will. (*SD*, 95). Here Kierkegaard continues his

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<sup>117</sup> Ussher argues that: 'It is evident that we cannot live with the Existentialist universe: for it omits all of our non-rational intuitions except the single one of Dread.' Arland Ussher, *Journey Through Dread*, p. 148.

The easiest response would be that Kierkegaard, at least, recognises despair also. Besides this, obvious, answer, we have to stress (one more time), that Kierkegaard is interested in accentuating some (the most important in his opinion) general characteristics of man's nature. These characteristics are, besides anxiety and despair, the 'paradox' with the consequent 'offence', the 'moment' with the consequent active and actual unification of freedom, necessity and responsibility, and most of all, will and faith. Personal will to actualise our freedom, and personal faith in the indefinite horizon of our future possibilities.

argumentation from *PF*, where he states that the opposite of doubt is not knowledge and theoretical understanding but will and faith.

Indeed, in conclusion, let me repeat: the creation of our selves (in history and as historical selves), is something difficult and demanding. As Kierkegaard puts it:

As a rule, men are conscious only momentarily, conscious in the midst of big decisions, but they do not take the daily everyday into account at all; they are spirit of sorts for an hour one day a week—which, of course, is a rather crude way to be spirit. But eternity is the essential continuity and demands this of a person or that he be conscious as spirit and have faith. (*SD*, 105).

Becoming a self, continuously making self-conscious decisions and having faith that this can be is tremendously difficult. Kierkegaard however, argues that there is no other way.

### Human/Political Self

My analysis has so far focused on analysing the structure of the self as a historical self. Such an analysis, however, runs the risk of isolating the Kierkegaardian self, separating it off in a solipsistic universe. In order to avoid such a conclusion, as a coda to this chapter, I draw attention to Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* (hereafter *TA*). Here, it becomes evident that the Kierkegaardian historical self is always also a political self, existing in society.<sup>118</sup>

If we, as free historical subjects, have the freedom and the responsibility to create our historical selves through our decisions, then we also take sole

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<sup>118</sup> Kierkegaard does not refuse the historical role of structured communities of human beings as societies, nations or armies. What he refuses however, is the historical primacy of these institutions. Totalities depend and ground themselves in their parts, thus, in the individual human beings who constitute them, instead of the opposite.

responsibility for living in the societies in which we find ourselves. Kierkegaard privileges the inner struggle to create ourselves, but that does not mean that he believes that we can be selves without reference to the external world. If he stresses personal responsibility repeatedly, one of the reasons for so doing, I contend, is in order to re-evaluate social existence, not neglect it. Personal responsibility is reconfigured socially into political responsibility. In *Two Ages* and more specifically in the third section of this text titled 'Conclusions from a Consideration of the Two Ages', Kierkegaard sketches the position of the individual in modern politics. Kierkegaard characterises his (present) age as something shallow and as an age which is totally lost in trivialities.

In contrast to the age of revolution, which took action, the present age is an age of publicity, the age of miscellaneous announcements: nothing happens but still there is instant publicity...The age of great and good actions is past; the present age is the age of anticipation. (*TA*, 70-71).

I have already argued that at the centre of Kierkegaard's conception of history is personal decision. Actuality becomes actuality only through personal decisions in history. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Kierkegaard underlining the importance of decisions and actions in society:

Action and decision are just as scarce these days as is the fun of swimming dangerously for those who swim in shallow water. Just as an adult, himself reveling in the tossing waves, calls to those younger: "Come on out, just jump in quickly"—just so does decision lie in existence, so to speak (although, of course, it is in the



individual), and shouts to the youth who is not yet enervated by too much reflection and overwhelmed by the delusions of reflection: “Come on out, jump in boldly.” Even if it is a rash leap, if only it is decisive, and if you have the makings of a man, the danger and life’s severe judgment upon your recklessness will help you to become one. (TA, 71).

The above is central to any interpretation of Kierkegaard’s theory of ‘decision’. ‘[D]ecision lies in existence.’ ‘[I]t is in the individual.’ And this individual decision is a ‘leap’.<sup>119</sup> Here we have the three elementary Kierkegaardian claims about the making of history:

- a) A decision always refers to actuality i.e. it is always the concrete actualisation of one possibility.
- b) This decision can be made only by an individual human being. And
- c) This decision is a free (thus undetermined) product of man’s personal free will.

Kierkegaard’s stress on the need for individual actions has of course been the overriding theme of this chapter. Theoretical contemplation does not create history, will does.

That a person stands or falls on his actions is becoming obsolete; instead everybody sits around and does a brilliant job of bungling through with the aid of some reflection and also by declaring that they all know very well what has to be done. (TA, 73-74).

Relations between individuals and thus political and social relations lack inwardness and thus ‘the relation does not exist or the relation is an inert

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<sup>119</sup> Moment does not signify only our faith in God and our faith that ‘God means that everything is possible’, but also refers to our freedom of will.

cohesion.’ (TA, 78). Inwardness does not therefore bring about social isolation, according to Kierkegaard; it is, in fact, the crucial factor in any genuine communication and relation between individuals. Kierkegaard insists on the need for personal decisions in response to the dangers of ‘social leveling’. Individuality cannot really exist while ‘generation’ (another abstract generalisation) is the prevailing social ‘fashion’. (TA, 84).

Whenever an individual human being submits herself and her freedom of will to the ‘state’ or to the ‘generation’, she ‘belongs to an abstraction in which reflection subordinates’ her. (TA, 85). ‘Leveling is not the action of one individual but a reflection-game in the hand of an abstract power.’ (TA, 86). Reflection necessarily generates abstractions. History, however, is a matter of concreteness; the historical is always a concrete action.

It is important to stress that Kierkegaard is not hostile to communities of human beings. Instead, he argues, that individual human beings cannot submit themselves to abstractions. This is the reason that Kierkegaard is hostile even to ‘Christendom’. For him, the latter is just another ‘empty’ abstraction. ‘The abstraction that individuals paralogistically form alienates individuals instead of helping them.’ (TA, 91).

If, however, an individual is ready to take responsibility for freely creating herself through her own decisions, then an authentic community can appear; a community of free and responsible human selves. ‘Contemporaneity with actual persons, each of whom is someone, in the actuality of the moment and the actual situation gives support to the single individual.’ (TA, 91).

Ultimately, the real danger, for Kierkegaard, lies in the perspective of social groups that incorporate their members, without leaving them enough ‘air’ to

breath and complete themselves. In this context, individuality does not refer to social solipsism, but, on the contrary, to an authentic social condition for healthy communities.

Being a 'political' or a 'social' self is in no way opposed to being a (historical/existential) self. At stake in both is our personal engagement with given social conditions. Kierkegaard's belief that only 'subjectivity' is true does not mean that he renders his 'subject' a socially secluded entity.<sup>120</sup>

### Conclusion

Having closely studied Kierkegaard's arguments in the 'Interlude', in *CA*, *SD* and *TA*, I claim that 'Kierkegaard's concept of history' can give us an alternative approach to the problem of the nature of history and the historical. Hegel and his pupils (Marx being included here) monopolise the field of the philosophy of history. Kierkegaard's stress on the existence of freedom in history and his focus on active personal engagement in creating the historical can present us with a fresh 'glance'. Even if we disagree with his arguments we have, at least, to accept that his approach can restore the passion and the dignity of our personal participation to history. Becoming a self in Hegel's philosophy of history simply means being an instrument for the historical completion of reason. Historical selfhood is thereby lost. Becoming a self, in Kierkegaard's concept of history, is the central struggle for the free creation of history.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> More on this matter in my next chapter.

<sup>121</sup> I will say more about the differences of Hegel and Kierkegaard regarding their views in history in my fourth chapter.

## Chapter Four

### **Hegel's philosophy of history and Kierkegaard's concept of history: a synthesis instead of a confrontation**

#### Introduction

My aim in this chapter will be threefold: a) to give a more elaborate synopsis of Hegel's claims on the nature of history and a similar more elaborate analysis of the Kierkegaardian concept of history drawing on my conclusions from the previous three chapters, b) to argue in favour of a synthesis of their points of view rather than view them only as direct philosophical opponents or treating their philosophies on history as totally and utterly incompatible, and c) to explain and analyse the reasons that make me believe that all the past positions regarding their relations are either partly or totally flawed.

While I have focused in my previous chapters on Hegel's philosophy of history (chapter one) and on Kierkegaard's concept of history (chapters two and three), I intend in this chapter to deepen and enrich my analysis of both of them by a) presenting further argumentation in regard with their approach to history and the historical and b) by comparing their views on history.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The reason why new material is presented here on their approaches to history when I have already analysed their views in previous chapters is a practical one: the need to structure my thesis in a way that would allow me to proceed in my analysis step by step. My first steps were to present as clear and as precise as possible Hegel's and Kierkegaard's approaches to history. Now that I intend to compare Hegel's approach to Kierkegaard's approach I have to complete my analysis by giving the fullest possible picture of their views. (This is quite similar to a composition of a musical piece. We can start by giving first the two basic melodies and then, while we bring (and mix) together these melodies, we present some fresh nuances of these melodies with the specific purpose of pointing out their full musicality.)

As the title of this chapter indicates, I will not simply try to compare their views to each other. I will proceed rather at a synthesis of their approaches. I will argue that this synthesis can give us a better understanding of their views on history while at the same time it can provide us with a deeper and fuller grasp of the nature of history and the historical.

The most usual views on the relations between Hegel and Kierkegaard consider their philosophies as either directly opposite to each other or as incompatible. Niels Thulstrup in his *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* is the main adherent of the first view and Jon Stewart in his *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* of the latter view.

I will analyse their theories regarding the relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard and I will argue that both of these views fail to fully capture the complex relations of Hegel and Kierkegaard.<sup>123</sup>

I will conclude this chapter by giving two specific quotations from Hegel and Kierkegaard. I will do so because in these quotations both Hegel and Kierkegaard reveal to us their ambivalent and ambiguous relation to philosophy and faith.

I will start by giving a (deeper and richer) synopsis of Hegel's philosophy of history. I will continue by giving a (deeper and richer) synopsis of Kierkegaard's approach to history. I will go on first to a comparison of their views and then to a synthesis of their approaches. I will then proceed to examine Thulstrup's and Stewart's view on the relations between Hegel and Kierkegaard, and I will also examine similar approaches.

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<sup>123</sup> My comparison however will stay only in Hegel's and Kierkegaard's approaches to history and the historical while both Thulstrup and Stewart examine Hegel's and Kierkegaard's overall philosophical views.

A quotation from Hegel's *Early Theological Writings* and one quotation from Kierkegaard's *Prefaces* will conclude my chapter by giving us a clear example of why we cannot view either Hegel or Kierkegaard as absolutely 'one-dimensional' thinkers, devoted either to pure speculation or to absolute faith.

### Hegelian claims on history

In the first chapter Hegel's philosophy of history was synoptically examined. It was argued there that we can detect two main Hegelian claims about history: a) a metaphysical claim that in history we can find in work reason's necessity and b) an epistemological claim that we can fully understand and know our past history.

### **Reason**

Reason's nature was defined as a holistic and purposeful activity of the spirit. The nature of the spirit was depicted as an equivalent to the nature of 'God'; it was further stated however, that this 'spirit' exists within history in both nature and human beings. In this way Hegel appears to put 'God' within this spatio-temporal world of ours. Reason refers directly to an activity that has as its purpose to enable universal spirit to understand fully its nature through history.<sup>124</sup>

Reason's necessity is something different from logical necessity. Hegelian necessity refers directly to the (necessary) actualisation of universal spirit's self-understanding. Hegel also declares that this actualisation can lead history

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<sup>124</sup> Hegel's 'Reason' is not a static logical activity. As Arthur Berndtson argues: '...reason for Hegel is not fixed and detached; it is an immanent process, which creates the logic, nature and mind.' Arthur Berndtson, 'Hegel, Reason and Reality', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1) Sep., 1959), p.44.

My disagreement with Berndtson however is that Hegel's Reason in the way Berndtson describes it is so general and abstract that it ends being vague. In my view Reason in Hegel is above everything else a teleological (purposeful) activity of the Spirit.

to one and only one (and thus necessary) conclusion: that all human beings are free.<sup>125</sup>

Reason thus is *par excellence* a historical activity which operates within spatio-temporal actuality. Hegel distinguishes understanding (*Verstand*) from his logic which he calls reason (*Vernunft*). He further states that we, human beings, can fully know and understand the nature of our history. He grounds this statement in the historical fact of the Incarnation. History then becomes for Hegel the only actual field for his reason. Hegel even more, is interested in thoroughly examining our past history with the philosophical certainty that he can detect and prove reason's necessity.<sup>126</sup>

Hegel's metaphysical claim has as its direct philosophical implication the claim that reason, and not human beings, is the ultimate historical agent. Hegel furthermore argues that single human beings cannot really create history. History can be made only by structured communities which can objectify human passions by transcending their individual parts' will into objective state laws.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Reason then must fulfill this historical task: to direct human communities into a specific political state that will provide the necessary conditions for the members of these communities to become free. Hegel's *PR* shows emphatically Hegel's view on how people can be 'free' and what the exact meaning of their 'freedom' is. As J. A. Leighton states: 'Freedom is the Idea of Spirit... All the struggles of nations and individuals are stepping-stones by which men rise to freedom. J.A. Leighton, 'Hegel's Conception of God', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov., 1896), p.611.

Leighton however cannot point out the exact Hegelian use of the word 'freedom'. He gives to Hegel's freedom a metaphysical dimension which does not accord with Hegel's political use of freedom. Hegel in *PR* again is quite clear about the specific context and the specific meaning of this freedom.

<sup>126</sup> As Gareth Stedman Jones argues, in Hegel's thought: 'God and the processes of the world were merged in human history in ascending stages of relation and recognition, until Spirit came to see that reason and reality were identical. The Christian story was thus seen as a symbolic enactment of this process of recognition and merging.' Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Faith in History', *History Workshop*, No. 30 (Autumn, 1990), p. 64.

I disagree with Jones however in that I argue that Hegel uses the Incarnation as the very basis of his philosophy of history.

<sup>127</sup> Hegel believes that, if we try to view history purely as an activity of single human beings, we will eventually end in a totally chaotic and meaningless historical universe. Social and ethical institutions and mainly organised states can guarantee us (in Hegel's view) the

### **Knowledge of the past**

Hegel's epistemological claim has as its direct philosophical implication the claim that we, human beings, should focus our interest upon the knowledge and the understanding of our historical past, because only in this way can we fully comprehend the nature of our history.

The teaching of the concept, which is also history's inescapable lesson, is that only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal apprehends this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm...The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.<sup>128</sup>

Hegel here clearly states that: a) the ideal (spirit in the form of human mind) can apprehend the real world (the world of historical existence) and b) this apprehension can refer only to an understanding of what has already past. Hegel thus considers history only as the past which can be apprehended through human mind. In this way, Hegel can be viewed as a proponent of history which is mainly an object of our epistemological concern. History is for human beings only a past that we can know and understand.

### **Order and meaning in history**

Hegel tries to establish an order within historical process. He claims that if we take history to consist only of human actions and individual desires we will find

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necessary 'objectivity'. S. W. Dyde in 'Hegel's Conception of Freedom', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 6, (Nov., 1894), p. 664 and Donald J. Maletz in 'History in Hegel's Philosophy of Right', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), p. 222, point out the historical primacy of states and nations over single human beings. Both of them however fail to explicitly underline Hegel's absolute disregard of the historical importance of single human beings.

<sup>128</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p.13.



ourselves lost in the abyss of fortuity. Hegel takes individual's historical actions to be without consistency. Hegel however cannot take historical contingency to be the real nature of history. He wants two things: a) to find coherence and purposeful agency within history and b) to claim that human beings can totally apprehend this historical coherence.

'... [W]e have to discover the causes and reasons behind the events.' (*IPH*, 25). '... [W]orld history is a rational process.' (*IPH*, 27).

In history, we must look for a general design, the ultimate end of the world, and not a particular end of the subjective spirit or mind; and we must comprehend it by means of reason, which cannot concern itself with particular and finite ends, but only with the absolute...That world history is governed by an ultimate design, that it is a rational process—whose rationality is not that of a particular subject, but a divine and absolute reason...Reason is self-sufficient and contains its end within itself; it brings itself into existence and carries itself into effect. (*IPH*, 28).

If we have to find reason within history we have to be able to find something stable and necessary within historical process, which is impossible if we continue understanding history as something utterly contingent: 'Everywhere we see a motley confusion which draws us into its interests, and when one thing disappears, another at once takes its place.' (*IPH*, 32).

### **God's providence**

But how can we prove that in the heart of history lie necessity, purpose and coherence? We can do it only if we believe that God's providence is the ultimate agent in history.

The concrete events are the ways of providence, the means it uses, the phenomena in which it manifests itself in history; they are open to our inspection, and we only have to relate them to the general principle referred to above. (*IPH*, 36).

But we cannot really be sure that this 'providence' can be apprehended by human (and thus finite) beings. In any case God can work in mysterious ways. Hegel then cannot secure the 'government' of reason in history. He has then to take his argumentation even further; he has to claim that God's providence: a) is always at work within history without confining itself only in sporadic appearances (miracles); and b) that God works in ways that can be reached by human minds.

If God is placed beyond the reach of our rational consciousness, we are no longer obliged to trouble ourselves about his nature, or indeed to look for reason in world history; the way is then open for any arbitrary hypotheses. (*IPH*, 37).

In this way, Hegel can continue to argue about the existence of reason within history only if he bases his arguments on two (absolutely) necessary preconditions: a) God's providence exists and it is always at work within historical process and b) human beings can rationally know this. 'When God reveals himself to man, he reveals himself essentially through man's rational faculties;' (*IPH*, 39). Hegel argues that Christianity gave us the possibility to be sure about both of his above mentioned preconditions:

Christianity is the religion which has revealed the nature and being of God to man. Thus we know as Christians that God is; God is no longer an unknown quantity: and if we continue to say that he is,

we are not Christians. Christianity demands that humility to which we have already referred, a humility which makes us seek to know God not through our own unaided efforts but with the help of divine knowledge and wisdom. Christians, then, are initiated into the mysteries of God, and this also supplies us with the key to world history. For we have a definite knowledge of providence and its plan. It is one of the central doctrines of Christianity that providence has ruled and continues to rule the world, and that everything which happens in the world is determined by and commensurate with the divine government. (*IPH*, 41).

Hegel cannot claim that we can have a 'definite knowledge' of history without first taking as an absolute secure fact the existence of God's providence. This 'supplies us with the key to world history.'

### **Incarnation and history**

Christianity cannot exist without the historical fact of Jesus as the God who lived among us, as the God who lived within history. Incarnation thus becomes the corner-stone of Hegel's argumentation on the nature of history. Even Hegel's notorious statement that: 'What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.' (*PR*, 10), is explained by Knox in this way:

Hegel's philosophy as a whole might be regarded as an attempt to justify his identification of rationality with actuality and vice versa, but his doctrine depends ultimately on his faith in God's Providence, his conviction that history is the working out of His rational purpose. That purpose, as the purpose of the Almighty, is not so impotent as to remain a mere ideal or aspiration, and

conversely, what is genuinely actual or effective in the world is simply the working of that purpose.’ (*PR*, 302).

In my first chapter I argued that Hegel’s view on the hidden necessity of history is based on his interpretation of Incarnation. His argument is based on his belief that Incarnation is a historical fact that has brought God within temporality. From there Hegel goes on arguing that we (human beings) can understand this historical fact precisely because it is something that occurred within temporality. The natural outcome of my interpretation is that Hegel here makes two specific claims: a) a metaphysical one that there is a necessity within the progress of history and b) an epistemological claim that we can know this necessity.<sup>129</sup>

Hegel’s metaphysical claim first brings God within our spatio-temporal world, and then makes God fully accessible through reason. His epistemological claim is wholly based on his metaphysical claim. If there is a hidden necessity of reason (God’s Providence) within historical progress, then human beings (because they participate in Spirit) can and should know this necessity. But they can know it only if the historical fact has already occurred. We can have knowledge only of our historical past, not of our historical present or of our historical future. As Hegel underlines in *PS*: ‘But recollection, the inwardizing, of that experience, has preserved it...’ (*PS*, 492).

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<sup>129</sup> As Richard Kroner states it in his introduction to Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings*: It is true that Hegel believed in the historical process as divinely ordained...History is shaped by Providence, and Providence is Reason and can therefore be understood by the speculative dialectic of the philosopher. From this conviction a certain quietism resulted, satisfaction with actual conditions, and submissiveness to the universal will—not of the state but of the world...Not party politics nor class prejudice, but metaphysical fervor determines his views. G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox, with an Introduction, and Fragments translated by Richard Kroner, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 65.

I disagree however with Kroner in that I argue that Hegel’s arguments about the Incarnation are not ‘metaphysical’ but historical. For Hegel, the Incarnation is a historical event that ontologically grounds humans’ capacity to know their past history.

This 'recollection' is nothing but the knowledge of the past. This 'inwardizing' is nothing but human capacity to fully know, understand and explain this historical past. 'The teaching of the concept...is also history's inescapable lesson...' (*PR*, 13). History's 'inescapability' is also history's 'necessity' and this necessity can and should be apprehended by human beings.

### **Hegelian freedom and necessity**

History cannot be the field of a 'blind destiny'.<sup>130</sup> Mind is 'reason', reason also governs history, so world history is the 'necessary development' of mind's (and thus of reason's) freedom:

Further, world history is not the verdict of mere might, i.e. the abstract and non-rational inevitability of a blind destiny. On the contrary, since mind is implicitly and actually reason, and reason is explicit to itself in mind as knowledge, world history is the necessary development, out of the concept of mind's freedom alone, of the moments of reason and so of the self-consciousness and freedom of mind. (*PR*, 216).

This necessary development of mind's freedom is also mind's knowledge. Spirit's freedom is the active force of history and spirit's knowledge the actual historical outcome. 'History is mind clothing itself with the form of events...' (*PR*, 217). The active agent in history is reason: '...reason governs the world...' (*IPH*, 27).

### **Individuals in history**

Hegel is quite clear in his view of individuals' role in history: they serve reason's aim. Individual human beings can act as they believe they should

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<sup>130</sup> I have already mentioned Hegel's 'theodicy'. That is, Hegel cannot tolerate the idea of pure historical contingency. There has to be a final pattern in history and Hegel's aim is to discover and disclose it.

act, but, no matter what, at the end, individuals are simple instruments of world mind:

All actions, including world-historical actions, culminate with individuals as subjects giving actuality to the substantial...They are the living instruments of what is in substance the deed of the world mind and they are therefore directly at one with that deed though it is concealed from them and is not their aim and object. (*PR*, 218).

Individuals cannot have the last word in making history. Individuals simply are serving the world-spirit. Individuals (when they act) cannot even understand the concealed aim of the world-spirit. Individuals are not the real historical agents. Individuals can only try (through reason) to understand and know history when history has already happened.

If there is something that can free history from the burden of chaos, if there is something that can give to history a meaning, it is reason. Its freedom consists in having within it the cause of its actions. Its freedom exists only because reason has its goals within it. Human beings can act freely within history, which means that human individuals can purposefully try to actualise their desires. This however is not what makes history; this is only means to a different cause: the self-understanding of world-spirit.

Individuals do exist within history but 'The state is the actuality of concrete freedom.' (*PR*, 160). The state can ground individuals and not the other way around: 'In the state, self-consciousness finds in an organic development the actuality of its substantive knowing and willing;'. (*PR*, 222-223). The state is the genuine historical subject (besides of course reason, which is the absolute

historical subject). Not even heroes can claim historical importance: 'Once the state has been founded, there can no longer be any heroes.' (*PR*, 245).

### **Conclusion**

Hegel's conceptualisation of the historical process, his 'absolute notion', is founded on a religious (and thus metaphysical) belief. His philosophy of history has been constructed on the (absolute and thus metaphysical again) ground of the existence within history of God's providence. His claims about the necessity and the knowledge of history can be validated philosophically only if we accept this providence.

His claim however about the primacy of states over their members is grounded on another need (an epistemological one), the need to avoid the chaos and the inconsistency of individual wills. Hegel argues that, if there is any possibility of transcending individual wills without resorting to metaphysics, this possibility refers directly to the existence of structured communities as a (unique) historical subject. In this way, for Hegel, we cannot be real selves without first being parts of a structured community. This participation in the whole is what makes individual beings selves. The whole grounds its members. History thus becomes: a) Spirit's actualisation through reason's activity and b) a play whose sole players are the structured communities of human beings.

### **Kierkegaardian claims**

In the second and the third chapter Kierkegaard's concept of history was depicted. It was argued that although Kierkegaard never tries to give us a systematic approach to the nature of history (as Hegel did), he nevertheless

gives us a coherent and unique philosophical approach to the problems of the nature of history and the historical.

In the second chapter the focus was upon the close analysis of the 'Interlude' from *PF*. It was argued that Kierkegaard there makes two philosophical claims: a) a metaphysical claim that freedom and not necessity exists within history, and b) an epistemological claim that we cannot fully know our historical past. It was further argued in the third chapter that Kierkegaard's necessity in the 'Interlude' refers to logical necessity and freedom's nature (in the 'Interlude') is freedom as the direct opposite of logical necessity. The relation between necessity and freedom is 'either/or' with Kierkegaard underlining that we cannot 'mediate' or synthesise them because necessity is a logical category (and thus out of temporality) and freedom is an existential condition (and thus within temporality).

In the third chapter the focus was upon the way Kierkegaard constructs the human 'Self'. Through a close reading and extensive analysis of Kierkegaard's texts: *CA*, *SUD*, and *TA* it was argued that Kierkegaard: a) recognises human beings as the only historical agents (a metaphysical claim) and b) that we should not focus our efforts upon knowing our historical past and we should focus instead upon shaping (with our personal decisions) our present and our future (an existential claim). A direct philosophical implication of the latter claim is the shift from knowing our (historical) past to shaping our (historical) present and future. In this way, the historical subject becomes historical through creating (her) present and future history instead of trying to



understand and apprehend (her) historical past. Temporality and personal decision is what makes both (personal) history and the (historical) 'Self'.<sup>131</sup>

### **Kierkegaardian concept of history**

Kierkegaard places at the very centre of history human individuals, who, through their conscious actions and decisions, freely create (their) history. The crucial elements of the Kierkegaardian concept of history are:

- 1) Denial of the existence of (logical) necessity within history. We cannot rely on logic to understand and explain our history. Historical actuality cannot be approached and analysed by logical (and thus necessary) categories.
- 2) The crucial forces behind the making of history are (personal) freedom of will and freedom of choice. Human beings create history through their free historical activity.
- 3) Anxiety is the indication (in reality) of these two kinds of freedom in every single human being.
- 4) The 'moment' is the moment of decision, the moment of (willful) action. This moment creates temporality in terms of past, present and future and thus also creates history.
- 5) Despair is the indication (in reality) of the need for every single human being to ground her own existence in something that lies outside herself: God.

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<sup>131</sup> As Stephen Crites points out: 'The "existing individual", an irreducibly temporal being, confronts an open future which he must determine by his own decision about himself.' Stephen Crites, *In the Twilight of Christendom' Hegel vs Kierkegaard on Faith and History*, (Pensylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972), p.24.

Crites however fails to acknowledge the full importance of this Kierkegaardian approach for the nature of history and the historical. Crites seems to believe that only Hegel gives us a philosophical view on history while Kierkegaard is purely focused on matters of faith.

- 6) Kierkegaard directly associates the creation of the human self and history. We create our selves in history through our free actions and at the same time we create (our) history by the very same actions. Temporality is the very core of both history and the human self.
- 7) Living in a structured community is something which gives to human beings the possibility of making their history, but it is not that human individuals are constituted in virtue of belonging to the communities they belong. For Kierkegaard it is the other way around, societies and communities cannot exist without the individuals. These social 'wholes' are grounded in the individuals who constituted them.

### **Kierkegaard and the Incarnation**

Kierkegaard is before everything else a Christian thinker. He is mainly concerned to invigorate what he believes to be a more authentic Christian way of living. He does not consider himself to be a philosopher of history. Starting however with an effort to understand the Incarnation he offers us his own arguments regarding history. He further elaborates his thoughts on history with an effort to define existentially the human self. 'Existentially' means that Kierkegaard does not try to produce another theoretical system. He begins with certain facts of life (anxiety and despair) and then he argues in favour of possible explanations and implications. The Kierkegaardian human self is the only historical agent and at the same time cannot exist outside (human) history. This self is *par excellence* the only historical agent. Through personal will and personal engagement this self produces history.

In *JC* Kierkegaard states that 'Christianity's claim that it had come into the world by a beginning that was simultaneously historical and eternal had

caused philosophy much difficulty;'. (*JC*, 134-135). This, 'Christianity's claim', is the Incarnation. How can we claim that God, who is eternal, lived and died among us like a finite human being? How can we really understand God's presence as a simple historical fact? Can we really claim that Incarnation is just another historical fact, i.e. something that occurred in time and can be approached by human understanding, the way human understanding tries to approach every other historical fact?

Kierkegaard does not give any answer in *JC*. In *PF* however he specifically refers to these questions. On the very front cover-page of *PF* he asks:

Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge? (*PF*, 1).

Incarnation is the core of Kierkegaard's thought through the whole text of the *Philosophical Fragments*. If, however we want to find some possible answers regarding the questions that are posed at the very beginning of this text, we must read the 'Interlude'. Freedom and necessity in the 'Interlude' are mutually exclusionary to each other as qualities.

Kierkegaard is interested in overcoming the problem of doubt regarding the truthfulness of Incarnation. Can we really overcome our doubt with 'objective thinking'? Can we really override doubt with 'better' or 'more' knowledge?

Kierkegaard has already given an answer in *JC*:

Thus it would be a misunderstanding for someone to think that doubt can be overcome by so-called objective thinking. Doubt is a higher form than any objective thinking, for it presupposes the latter

but has something more, a third, which is interest or consciousness. (JC, 170).

In the 'Interlude' Kierkegaard deepens and expands the above statement. Although his aim is to persuade us that we cannot believe in the Incarnation by means of knowledge but by means of faith, he nevertheless examines both the nature of history and the nature of the historical. Kierkegaard wants to prove that regarding any possible historical fact, i.e. regarding any possible occurrence within temporality: a) nothing happens necessarily (which means nothing is predestined by any kind of necessary law), on the contrary every single historical becoming is free and b) we, human beings, cannot be totally secure about the cause (the why) that made it (the historical occurrence) happen.

### **Freedom as opposite to logical necessity**

In order to argue in favour of the first claim (about freedom within temporality) Kierkegaard follows Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg's arguments about the notion of movement (*κίνησις*).<sup>132</sup>

Kierkegaard starts from Trendelenburg's arguments regarding the differences between the Aristotelian and the Hegelian concept of becoming.<sup>133</sup>

Kierkegaard is interested in Trendelenburg's analysis of the general 'doctrine of categories' of Aristotle. Kierkegaard wants to define the relationship between logic and ontology, i.e. the relationship between thought and being.

Gonzalez refers to an excerpt of Kierkegaard's notes:

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<sup>132</sup> Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1802-1872) was a critic of Hegelianism. He was mainly interested in Aristotle's work in Logic (*De Aristotelis categoriis*). See Dario Gonzalez's analysis in: 'Trendelenburg: An Ally against Speculation', from *Kierkegaard and his German Contemporaries, Tome I: Philosophy*, edited by Jon Stewart, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp.309-334.

<sup>133</sup> Dario Gonzalez, 'Trendelenburg: An Ally against Speculation', p.314.

Very likely what our age needs most to illuminate the relationship between logic and ontology is an examination of the concepts: possibility, actuality, and necessity...Good comments are to be found in Trendelenburg's *Logische Untersuchungen*,<sup>134</sup>

Kierkegaard in the 'Interlude' argues that becoming as such (as a historical becoming into actuality) cannot be approached or explained by logic. 'The problem of becoming is simply excluded from the domain of logic.'<sup>135</sup> It could be useful to have a synopsis of Kierkegaard's argument regarding the nature of becoming:

- 1) Kierkegaard following Trendelenburg refutes movement (*κίνησις*) within logic. Logical necessity cannot change, if something is necessarily logical, it is so in every possible world without changing. This is why Kierkegaard states that the 'necessary cannot be changed at all.' (*PF*, 74).
- 2) Kierkegaard defines becoming as a change, a movement from possibility to actuality. This 'becoming' is 'coming into existence'.
- 3) Becoming is movement, thus becoming cannot be necessary (logically necessary).
- 4) Kierkegaard states that freedom characterises becoming. He does not define further the nature of this freedom. He simply states that: 'All coming into existence occurs in freedom, not by way of necessity.' (*PF*, 75). In this way, Kierkegaard sets a gap between logic and historical becoming.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 315, the extract is from *Pap. VI B 54.19, p. 150/ JP 1, 199*.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 325.

Kierkegaard, so far, makes a metaphysical claim regarding the nature of history. If every historical becoming occurs in freedom, then in history (which is consisted by historical becomings, i.e. historical facts) we can find only freedom and no (logical) necessity. He goes even further stating that, because every cause that operates within actuality (the laws of physics for example) ends in a freely acting cause (God), we cannot explain history by using our scientific knowledge of laws. 'Every cause ends in a freely acting cause.' (*PF*, 75). Kierkegaard so far tries to dissociate history from logical necessity and also he tries to argue that even causality has in its very beginning freedom and thus we cannot ultimately explain history through causality.

Causality can describe how something happens in actuality, but causality cannot explain why something happens instead of something else. We can try to understand history as a series or a chain of causes and effects, but we will never be able to understand why this possibility has been actualised instead of another possibility. When something changes from being possible to being actual, (in the very beginning of any historical event), freedom rules and not necessity.

### **Human consciousness and history**

For Kierkegaard 'only the eternal has no history'. (*PF*, 76). He continues arguing that the historical is 'dialectical with respect to time.' (*PF*, 76). In the third chapter this is explained as human consciousness, as human experience of 'being in actuality'. Kierkegaard states (and that helps us understand why only human consciousness is truly historical) that 'Nature's imperfection is that it does not have a history...' (*PF*, 76). Kierkegaard thus claims that only human beings can have history, because only human beings can think about

their past while living their present and planning their future. In the third chapter this Kierkegaardian notion about human 'historicality' is explained further, as a purposeful and willful activity to create a historical self through taking (freely) decisions. Kierkegaard however states that: 'The more special historical coming into existence [human conscious reflection on its own past, present and future] comes into existence by way of a relatively freely acting cause, which in turn definitively points to an absolute freely acting cause.' (PF, 76). Human beings are 'relatively free' because they have to act within certain natural and social facts. God is the absolutely freely acting cause. Kierkegaard explains further this in *the Sickness unto Death*, where he grounds human selfhood in God.

### **Necessity in (past) history**

Kierkegaard uses his definition of 'becoming' in order to exclude any possibility of explaining history with logical categories. Kierkegaard defines as truly historical subjects only human beings who possess consciousness.

Kierkegaard attacks the notion of the necessity of the past in two ways:

- 1) He argues that although the past happened the way it happened and thus cannot be changed, the past however could be some other past, i.e. the past is not necessary because the past was first a present that occurred in freedom. Kierkegaard thus underlines that we can understand how something happened but not why this thing happened rather than something else.
- 2) He denies that any human apprehension of the past could make it necessary. (PF, 79).

Kierkegaard rejects both the argument that the past is necessary because it cannot be changed and the argument that because we can know it, our knowing it renders it necessary. Kierkegaard wants to underline the possibility of repentance. In repentance we can change our past because we can repent about a specific past fact of our life and by doing so we can nullify the consequences of this fact. '...the change of repentance which wants to nullify an actuality.' (*PF*, 77).

The most important philosophical consequences however of the above mentioned Kierkegaardian argument against the necessity of the past are that: a) we can describe how a specific past happened in this way but we cannot explain why this specific past has been actualised rather than another and

b) our knowledge of the past cannot create or reveal any necessity within it.

We have then already stepped into the second Kierkegaardian claim about the nature of our historical knowledge. If we cannot be sure about the 'why' something happened, we cannot claim that we have or we can possibly have a full knowledge of a historical fact.

### **Doubt**

Kierkegaard is now ready to proceed with the reasons that make him believe that we cannot overcome doubt with knowledge. The first reason has already been stated: we cannot have full knowledge of the historical facts; there is no way of understanding completely why something happens the way it happens and thus we must always necessarily be insecure regarding our historical knowledge. Kierkegaard draws on the Skeptics to expand his argument.



Immediate sensation and cognition cannot deceive. It is important to understand this in order to understand doubt and in order through it to assign belief its place. However strange it may seem, this thought underlies Greek skepticism...Greek skepticism was a withdrawing skepticism (*εποχή* [suspension of judgment]); they doubted not by virtue of knowledge but by virtue of will (deny assent—*μετριοπαθεῖν* [moderate feeling]). This implies that doubt can be terminated only in freedom, by an act of will, something every Greek skeptic would understand, inasmuch as he understood himself, but he would not terminate his skepticism precisely because he *willed* to doubt. (*PF*, 82, italics are not mine).<sup>136</sup>

When something occurs (when something happens within temporality and thus when something is changed from possibility to actuality), we can perceive it through our senses exactly the way has occurred. Kierkegaard however, following the Skeptics, argues that when we want to explain to our selves exactly what happened and why, we cannot be totally secure in our interpretation. If we cannot be totally sure then we must doubt. This doubt of ours cannot be overruled by our knowledge; it can be overruled only by our will. Greek Skeptics willed to deny assent because they did not want to be in error. Their reaction then was a negative one, i.e. they refused themselves even the possibility of an interpretation because they believed they could never be fully sure about their own judgment. Kierkegaard underlines the fact (for him) that doubt in the Skeptics is not a conclusion of knowledge or the lack of knowledge; doubt in the Skeptics is an act of (free) will. I cannot be

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<sup>136</sup> For an analytical display on the matter of the relations between Kierkegaard and the Skeptics see: A. J Rudd, 'Kierkegaard and the Skeptics', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 (1): 71-88.

one hundred percent sure about the truthfulness of my interpretation of the mere fact and thus I refuse (I will so) to come to a conclusion. The necessary consequence of this argument is that doubt is not coming from the mere fact; doubt is born from the human interpretation of this fact. Doubt is not a product of less knowledge so that it could be removed by 'more' or 'better' knowledge; doubt is a direct product of human (free) will.

The problem of doubt lies in the nature of our (human) consciousness: 'The possibility of doubt, then, lies in consciousness...' (JC, 168). Kierkegaard associates doubt and the historical. If every historical fact is, first of all, a becoming into actuality, then whenever we want to explain the reason (the 'why') of this historical becoming we must doubt because we cannot be totally sure about our judgment. This doubt about why something happened can be removed not if we try to know as many details as possible about this historical becoming but if we (freely) will to stop doubting about it:

In contrast, it is now readily apparent that belief is not a knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of will...Insofar as that which by belief becomes the historical, and as the historical becomes the object of belief (the one corresponds to the other), does exist immediately and is apprehended immediately, it does not deceive. (PF, 83).

### **Belief**

The crucial statement by Kierkegaard here is that the historical and the object of belief 'correspond to each other'. In order for the mere fact to become 'historical', it needs first to be an 'object of belief' and in order for a mere fact to be an 'object of belief' it needs first to become historical. Kierkegaard thus

here recognises as 'the historical' only what can be perceived by human beings and at the same time underlines that historical fact is never only the mere occurrence but the active unification in human beings' mind of this mere occurrence and its interpretation by human consciousness.

### **The historical**

Now we have all the necessary details to unravel Kierkegaard's notion of the historical:

- 1) Every historical becoming happens in freedom, i.e. it could happen otherwise.
- 2) History is only human beings' history as this is perceived by their minds.
- 3) Historical fact is the union in human consciousness of the mere historical occurrence as this is perceived by human senses and the interpretation of this occurrence.
- 4) Every interpretation is always a relative interpretation and thus brings doubt.
- 5) We cannot overrule this doubt by means of knowledge but by means of our free will.
- 6) Every historical fact then is always (partly) an act of free human will to believe that something happened because of this reason instead of that reason.

This is why Kierkegaard claims that:

The conclusion of belief is no conclusion [*Slutning*] but a resolution [*Beslutning*], and thus doubt is excluded...Belief is the opposite of doubt. Belief and doubt are not two kinds of knowledge that can be

defined in continuity with each other, for neither of them is a cognitive act, and they are opposite passions. Belief is a sense for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that wants to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge. The doubter, for example, does not deny his own existence, but he draws no conclusions, for he does not want to be deceived. (*PF*, 84).

### **Historical knowledge**

Kierkegaard here completes his epistemological claim: we cannot (ever) know (in an absolutely sure and secure manner) any historical fact, because every historical fact is partly a product of free (and always relative) interpretation of the mere occurrence. In history then, we can have only interpretations and not knowledge. Our historical knowledge applies always to the way things happen and it can never explain the reason that made this particular possibility to be actualised instead of any other possibility.

Whenever thus we are searching for laws in history, we search to describe and to explain the 'how'. The 'why' remains a problem of our will. We can thus, give the reasons that gave Hitler the opportunity to be the leader of Germany in 1933, (poverty, disappointment with previous governments, et cetera), but we will never be able to know for sure why Hitler took power. That will always remain open to different interpretations no matter how many historical details we know.

That does not mean that we can arbitrarily interpret the historical data in any way we want. Kierkegaard says that we cannot obtain an 'absolute' (and thus necessary) historical knowledge. We cannot, however, impose our free will

upon the historical data in a way that could disregard them. Even if we are unable to be totally sure about why Hitler came to power in 1933, that does not mean that we can interpret the historical data in a way that could explain Hitler's rise to power, for example, as a direct effect of his lack of height.<sup>137</sup>

### **My arguments**

I argue that Kierkegaard's metaphysical claim aims to ensure the existence of individual free will and individual freedom of choice. I also argue that Kierkegaard's epistemological claim aims to shift the focus from 'knowing the history' to 'creating the history'. If we can find necessities in history, Kierkegaard believes that we will eventually find ourselves without freedom of will and freedom of choice. Kierkegaard however wants to argue in favour of the existence of personal responsibility and in favour of an open future. Understanding history in terms of logical categories deprives human beings of their historical spontaneity. Understanding history in terms of knowledge defines as the proper historical action only the examination of the past, which, for Kierkegaard is catastrophic because it does not care about creating the future.

Kierkegaard wants to underline the moral 'understanding' of history (which means the moral understanding of human history) against the stress upon the epistemological understanding of history. Kierkegaard in *CA* and *SUD* argues in favour of a free and personally responsible human 'historical' self. If we

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<sup>137</sup> I guess that even that could be an interpretation. Hitler had an inferiority complex because of his height and that made him able to struggle for power so passionately. This is also the reason that Alexander became 'Great' and Napoleon the emperor of Europe. In fact this example is a perfect one to understand Kierkegaard's notion of the historical. Even nowadays that we know so many details about what happened in the times of Hitler, Napoleon and Alexander the Great, even now that we have so effective historical methods regarding the gathering of the historical data, we cannot arrive to an exclusive explanation of the 'why' these three men: a) wanted to become what they became and b) they succeeded.

believe that we can explain everything in history with logic and the obtainment of historical knowledge we pass over individual historical agency in terms of taking decisions. We tend to see human beings as objects of an attainable knowledge instead of seeing them as active historical subjects who create (freely and willfully) their history.

### **Freedom of will and freedom of choice**

Before we proceed to examine how Kierkegaard argues in favour of human individuals as (being) the only active historical agents, we must try to further clarify the issue of 'freedom of will' and 'freedom of choice' as Kierkegaard understands them.<sup>138</sup>

We can argue that even in a wholly deterministic universe, human beings can have (a kind of) freedom of will and (a kind of) freedom of choice. We can argue for example, that we have always to will between three different ways of willing something, without however, being ever able to will whatever we want. We can will to sit, walk or run (these are the necessary options our deterministic universe allows us to will), but we cannot will to grovel because it is not in our (predetermined) nature. Kierkegaard (as we will see) accepts the so called 'objective' (and thus necessary) human conditions. We can will what our nature allows us to will. Furthermore, we have to choose between given possible options. Kierkegaard however argues in favour of historical agency in regard to human beings. We, at the end, will in a certain way (being totally responsible for what we will) and we make the final choice.

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<sup>138</sup> If we do not do so, there is always the danger of misunderstanding Kierkegaard's arguments about history and the historical, because in our 'post-modern' world, determinism, causality, freedom of will and freedom of choice have acquired a more complex nature than in Kierkegaard's era.

In fact we can give two examples that override even these 'objective' (and thus predetermined) conditions. We are aware of human beings that were born men and willfully and freely became women, overcoming even the given conditions of their natural sex. We also know that nowadays human beings can walk in space. It does not matter that they can do so only with the aid of technical support, at the end, human beings willed and chose something that was 'outside' their 'necessary' conditions.

Kierkegaard however is not interested in saying the final word on the theoretical matters of freedom of will and freedom of choice. In fact, we will misunderstand him if we choose to interpret him in this way. Kierkegaard's concern on the matters of freedom of will and freedom of choice is purely practical: in *CA* and *SUD* he constructs his 'historical subject' as an active and responsible historical agent. Freedom of will and freedom of choice can be explained not through theoretical reasoning but through the *de facto* existence within every human individual of anxiety and despair.

Kierkegaard's argument is not a theoretical (and so ideal) construction of the existence of freedom of will and freedom of choice. He begins with the given facts of the existence of anxiety and the existence of despair in human existence and having them as his starting points he tries to give possible reasons for why human beings always live in a state of anxiety and in a state of despair.

### **General remarks on anxiety and despair**

His answers are that: a) anxiety denotes the fear of taking the responsibility for our decisions and our actions, which always refers to our fear of being free to decide and act. Anxiety thus becomes the practical and actual proof of our

freedom of will and freedom of choice; and b) despair denotes that the ground of our existence lies outside of us, and specifically the ground of our self is God. We are free not to let ourselves open to the love of God, because we do possess freedom of will and freedom of choice; we cannot however escape being in despair whenever we do not let ourselves open to the love of God. In this way, the objective existence of despair within every single human being becomes a proof of God as the ground of our self.

Kierkegaard tries to be coherent in his exposition of the phenomena of anxiety and despair. If we take as granted that anxiety and despair are general and universal characteristics of human existence, Kierkegaard can offer us a quite plausible explanation. The problem lies in his absolute conviction about their generality and their universality. In fact, Kierkegaard argues that we can be in despair or in anxiety without ever noticing it. He cannot however prove to us beyond any possible doubt the truthfulness of his claims. Even here however, he earns an extra point for his epistemological claim: at the end, we cannot be totally secure regarding our historical knowledge, which means that it is quite consistent for him not to be able to provide us with an absolute theoretical or historical proof of the existence of anxiety and despair.

Kierkegaard then, cannot be totally judged for failing to provide us with absolute knowledge of anxiety and despair, as he has already argued against such knowledge. Kierkegaard tries to make us 'experience' our selves as historical subjects who live within history and who create history through our actions. The verb 'experience' refers directly to being able to avoid seeing ourselves as objects of theoretical understanding. To 'experience' in this



context signifies the way we should approach our history and our (historical) selves.

If Kierkegaard had written only the *Philosophical Fragments* we could never be able to argue that he had an original approach to history. Kierkegaard however in *the Concept of Anxiety* and in *The Sickness Unto Death* defines further the human Self in a way that makes it explicitly historical: becoming a 'Self' is a duty every human being ought to accept in order to create (willfully and freely) in temporality his 'selfishness' through personal decisions. In fact, Kierkegaard argues that it is actually our natural capacity to freely take decisions and actions that creates temporality itself.

### **Anxiety**

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard acknowledges and tries to define in detail the existence of the 'anxiety over nothing'. My argument is that Kierkegaard's analysis of the phenomenon of anxiety is crucial for his 'concept of history' in that he creates (having as his starting point and his ground the actual existence of 'anxiety' in every single human being) a 'human historical agent' who is agent because she is free to decide, act and choose, and she is historical because this freedom that lies in the very heart of her existence can be actualised and further developed only within existing actuality (which is always historical for Kierkegaard following his arguments in the 'Interlude').

In the 'Interlude' freedom is defined simply as the opposite of logical necessity. In CA freedom becomes the most crucial element of existing human beings. His analysis, however, must not be taken as a theoretical effort to define a 'concept'. Although Kierkegaard speaks of 'the concept' of anxiety, we do not have here another epistemological construction. Freedom can

really be apparent only when we, as living (and thus existing) human beings try to experience our selves in times of action and decision: '...truth is for the particular individual only as he himself produces it in action.' (CA, 138). This freedom has two sides; it is 'sweet' and 'dizzy':

...[A]nxiety is the dizziness of freedom...Freedom succumbs in this dizziness...In anxiety there is the selfish infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a choice but ensnaringly disquiets with its sweet anxiousness. (CA, 61).

Anxiety is freedom, this freedom is presented to us as dizziness whenever we experience the 'selfish infinity of possibility'. 'Freedom's possibility announces itself in anxiety.' (CA, 74). But what is the 'selfishness' of anxiety? Why does Kierkegaard relate freedom to selfishness? Is this an indication of Kierkegaard's belief in a pure voluntarism that takes as real and predominant in history only human volition? Is then Kierkegaard's freedom another effort to argue in favour of an arbitrary subjective volition as the only possible freedom? The answer must be totally negative. First of all, Kierkegaard does not argue in favour of the absolute predominance of a 'free' subjective will. Kierkegaard accepts the objective existence of the given natural, social and historical conditions: 'Each individual begins in an historical nexus, and the consequences of nature still hold true.' (PF, 73). Secondly, Kierkegaard's claim is against the idea that we can have an objective, general and theoretical knowledge of our freedom. Thus he states that: 'For selfishness is precisely the particular, and what this signifies only the single individual can know as the single individual, because when it is viewed under universal

categories it may signify everything in such a way that it signifies nothing at all.' (CA, 77).

Logical, universal and general categories are inappropriate to define freedom within history. This much we already know from the 'Interlude'. Here however we have the further definition of this freedom as something that 'belongs' to single individuals. Kierkegaard goes on to define this 'selfishness': '... "self" signifies precisely the contradiction of positing the universal as the particular.' (CA, 78).

This contradiction is a real one and not a theoretical one.<sup>139</sup> This contradiction however is what makes human beings historical selves, because this contradiction, when it is experienced by human beings in times of (free) decision becomes the 'moment'. The Kierkegaardian 'moment', as this is analysed in CA, is the creator of history and the necessary creating element of temporality. 'Only with the moment does history begin...and with this [the moment] the concept of temporality posited...' (CA, 89). This moment however is anxiety, as this is experienced by the individuals: 'In the individual life, anxiety is the moment...' (CA, 81).

### **Time, the moment and history**

Now we can have an even more detailed picture of the 'Kierkegaardian concept of history'. Temporality refers to the specific human experience of time as past, present and future. If time is defined as an infinite succession and the 'moment' is another conceptual abstraction, then the present has no existence at all. That means that all that is there for us (human beings) to

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<sup>139</sup> It goes without saying that this is an 'actual' or 'existing' and not a logical contradiction. Kierkegaard has already established in *PF* that logic is incompatible with history. Here he continues in the same motif. Being a self is a historical experience and as such is always experienced by human beings as a 'tension', an anxiety.

grasp from our history is the time passing by, without being able to know anything about our present and our future.

Kierkegaard's aim here is to approach the problem of the coexistence of eternal and temporal in actuality. He does not try to prove it directly. He points out instead that, if we want to be able to distinguish between our past, our present, and our future, we need to find another definition of time besides 'time as an infinite succession'. 'Spirit' signifies for him self-consciousness and the 'moment' signifies for him something that can actively unify eternal and temporal and can distinguish past from present and from future.

Here we have a further evolution of the Kierkegaardian concept of history. The 'moment' signifies the actualisation in temporality of our freedom of will and freedom of choice. At the same time, temporality and history can exist only through this 'moment'. Kierkegaard believes that he can give a more accurate account of the nature of historical time. He makes a distinction between an abstract concept of time that 'passes by' and the human experience of time.

Human beings, exactly because they are spirits, can be conscious of their personal existence in time and so they can refer to their past, their present, and their future. They can do so because they can intersect time in 'the moment', which means they can step outside of the flux of time and they can make decisions about their present and their future.

Ultimately, Kierkegaard argues that if our common human experience of temporality (with past, present, and future being strictly distinct) truly exists, then we need a different definition of time than that of temporal flow. History begins with the 'moment' because the moment is a free personal decision. These decisions create our present and our future, but also become our

personal past. This moment then is the Kierkegaardian core of history and the historical.

One further philosophical implication of the Kierkegaardian moment is that the future becomes the most significant part of historical time instead of the past. As Kierkegaard states it: ‘...the future is the whole of which the past is a part...The moment and the future in turn posit the past...’ (CA, 89-91). Only when we understand ourselves in terms of our future goals can we really grasp ourselves as historical subjects who take decisions. We relate ourselves with our past experience; we use this experience to take a present decision; this present decision will shape our future.

Kierkegaard here continues his argument about the individual’s historical agency. We are free to will and we are free to choose. The moment becomes the active and concrete actualisation of these freedoms, while at the same time temporality and history are constituted by this moment. This freedom is not another theoretical construction which can be approached through logic. This freedom is the very core of human self and as such can be only realised and not understood:

In turning inward, he discovers freedom...not freedom to do this or that in the world...but freedom to know of himself that he is freedom. (CA, 108).

History is made with our eyes looking towards the future and not with our minds looking towards the past. Furthermore, the past can be always reactivated. This is another very important philosophical implication of the Kierkegaardian analysis of historical time. Kierkegaard tries to explain the possibility of repentance by this possible ‘reactivation’ of the past. Whenever

we repent we can change the consequences of our past actions and thus we can change our past. It is more than this though. I will try to explain why.

We can choose to relate ourselves in different ways with our past, thus we can continuously reactivate our past. If, for example, I had a car accident ten years ago, I can choose during the next nine years to quit driving because of the fear this accident caused me. I can choose however, at some point after these nine years to try to drive again in a way that would make me avoid having such an accident again, which means I can choose to become a more careful driver. In this way the same fact from my past can make me first quit driving and then become a better driver. From that it follows that even if we cannot change our past, we can change our point of view towards it and by doing so we can change our present and future history.

So far I have argued that Kierkegaard takes as a historical fact the mere occurrence along with our interpretation of it. Now I argue that Kierkegaard takes as a historical fact the mere occurrence along with our interpretation and our degree of engagement towards it.

A last example probably will help us understand better the nature of this statement. Let us say for example, that twenty years ago I tried to be a professional football player. Every single team rejected me. I was so frustrated by this fact that I stopped even watching football. In fact I was so frustrated that I stopped doing any kind of physical exercise because I believed that this fact (my rejection) signified and proved my total incapacity for being an athlete. At that time I considered this particular fact a very traumatic experience. Ten years ago while I was continuing my studies I decided to evaluate this historical fact differently. Instead of being frustrated by this

failure I considered myself lucky because I continued with my studies and I found out that this was my real inclination (besides the fact that I was quite happy and satisfied). After my reevaluation of this particular past event I even started running again.

Somebody might argue that this is not a 'different' past event. If we take as a historical event only the mere occurrence, then yes, this is not different. The rejection is the same before and after my second thought about it. If, however we argue (following Kierkegaard) that the historical fact always comprises the unification of the mere occurrence along with our interpretation and our evaluation, then we can continuously change our past by changing either our interpretation or our evaluation. The most important feature of this approach to the past is that it enables us to understand our present differently and create a different future. But we have to have as our necessary preconditions the acceptance of the existence of our individual freedom of will and freedom of choice.

### **Kierkegaard's historical agent**

What Kierkegaard's concept of history allows us to have is the advantage and the responsibility of being the sole historical agents. What it means to be such a historical agent is depicted and analysed by Kierkegaard in *The Sickness unto Death*. Kierkegaard here completes his analysis of the nature of the human self. Kierkegaard's aim in *SUD* is (in my opinion) twofold: a) to give an explanation for the existence of despair within the human self and b) to give us the limits (and the horizon or the context) of the experience of being a human self in actuality (in contrast with a theoretical and purely descriptive definition of human self).

The existence of despair, for Kierkegaard, signifies the loss of the 'ground' of our existence. We are free to will and choose, but there is only one way to have a grounded and well-balanced existence and this way is to (freely and willfully) open ourselves to God. The crucial philosophical advantage of Kierkegaard's argument regarding the existence of despair is that it offers us an 'existential' analysis of the human self. It is existential because it refers to existing human 'moods' instead of giving us a cognitive analysis of the human self. Kierkegaard's point is not a definite knowledge of the human self or a theoretical analysis of its features. Kierkegaard argues about what it is to be (in actuality) a human self.

Even if we do not believe in God we can profit by Kierkegaard's approach because he describes ways of being a self instead of giving us theoretical models about the possible structure of the human self. His approach can give us the opportunity to 'experience' the ways we are instead of giving us lessons on what we could be in theory.

As for the 'limits' or the 'horizon' or the 'context' of the experience of being a human self, which I argue is his second aim, they are not theoretical limits, they are the existing and actual horizons of our (actual) life. Which means that, in my point of view, Kierkegaard in *SUD* gives us the actual necessities of our existence. We have to will and choose our selves within certain social and natural preconditions and at the same time we have to try to create the (historical) meaning of our lives. And the most important horizon or limit or context of our lives is that, if we want to live a life free from the feeling of despair, we have to ground our (free) lives in God.



We are not complete selves when we are born. We are becoming selves through our self-conscious actions. In this way, being a self and having (or creating) a history is one and the same thing. Becoming a self is a duty we have to take freely within history. Having a history is a duty we have to freely take if we want to become ourselves.<sup>140</sup>

History thus, can be made only when we experience our (natural) capacity for self-creation. At the same time, this capacity is a duty we have to undertake if we want to actualise the possibility of being selves. What enables human beings to become selves (freedom of will, freedom of choice and continuous self-conscious action) also creates history. Kierkegaard here gives us the last detail (a very important one) of his 'concept of history': to be a self is to create a (personal) history. An unbroken bond unifies history and human selves. Temporality is both the heart of history and the core of human existence. Freedom of will and freedom of choice are the existing forces behind both self-becoming and history.

Kierkegaard thus argues in favour of individual human historical agency. This agency is constituted by the permanent self-conscious effort to create ourselves as meaningful and concrete selves: '...if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility [of being in despair].' (*SUD*, 15). To (freely) will and to be conscious of this is what characterises the way of being a human (historical) self: 'A person who has no

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<sup>140</sup> Mark C. Taylor says something similar when he argues that: '...it can be said that for Kierkegaard temporality is the form of human existence.' Mark C. Taylor, 'Time's Struggle with Space: Kierkegaard's Understanding of Temporality', *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Jul., 1973), p. 329. I argue however that Taylor fails to fully understand the connection between temporality and human existence. Kierkegaard completely interweaves human self and temporality. Temporality thus is not just the form of the self; temporality is the very blood of the (historical) self.

will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also.' (*SUD*, 29). This 'self' has to be 'concrete', which means that this self must be actualised in a certain (historical) way: 'To become oneself is to become concrete.' (*SUD*, 30).

If we choose to interpret Kierkegaard's claims as claims about the absolute (and utterly arbitrary) subjective way to create history (and to have a self), we neglect two crucial Kierkegaardian statements: a) we have to ground our very existence in something that lies outside ourselves, and b) we have to live in a certain society, in a certain historical period, and we have a certain (biological) nature.

Kierkegaard carefully points out that the limits of our (free) historical existence lie outside ourselves. In this way, to become a self means also to be aware of these (objective) limits. The danger of which Kierkegaard wants us to be aware is that of losing our 'uniqueness' in the crowd: '...by becoming a number instead of a self, just one more man, just one more repetition of this everlasting *Einerlei* [one and the same]' (*SUD*, 33).

It is not that Kierkegaard wants us to live 'away' and 'apart' from the society. It is that he stresses the danger of submitting to the power of the crowd. Kierkegaard is not the prophet of social seclusion. He wants, however, to make us aware of the difficulty of becoming a self. In his text *Two Ages*, in the section with the title 'The Present Age' he states that what is crucial for our selves and our history is to act on our own:

That a person stands or falls on his actions is becoming obsolete;  
instead, everybody sits around and does a brilliant job of bungling

through with the aid of some reflection and also by declaring that they all know very well what has to be done. (TA, 73-74).

We stand and fall on our actions. Knowledge (theoretical) can offer us nothing. Reflection and the effort to 'understand' cannot create (our) history. Kierkegaard wants to get us away from abstracted (theoretical) categories. Being a (historical) self is something totally concrete which cannot be defined by any kind of theoretical categories. Knowledge, as much as it means the application of theoretical categories of thinking, cannot explain what 'becoming a self' means.

### **Conclusion**

Kierkegaard starts from the need to find an authentic Christian way of existing. His arguments however can be used outside theology. He gives us an alternative point of view of the nature of history and the historical. He argues in favour of the direct relation of (freely) becoming a self and (freely) creating history with our own self-willed actions. He shifts the focus from 'knowing the historical past' to 'creating the historical future'. His stress in 'individuality' is not a refutation of society. Kierkegaard simply chooses to give historical primacy to individuals over their communities. His arguments are not being directed against societies. His arguments underline the danger of abstraction. Concreteness is a *sine qua non* quality for being a historical self. Before considering ourselves members of any given society ('society' is another general and theoretical abstraction for Kierkegaard), we need to become ourselves. Otherwise, we will find ourselves being numbers and members of the 'public':

But the existence of a public creates no situation and no community...The public may take a year and a day to assemble, and when it is assembled it still does not exist. The abstraction that individuals paralogistically form alienates individuals instead of helping them. (TA, 91).

### Hegel and Kierkegaard: a possible synthesis

The first question regarding the relations of Hegel and Kierkegaard is whether we really need to examine their thought together. Regarding their arguments on history, my answer is yes, we do. They represent the extreme opposite analyses of history and thus their approaches denote the limits of any given understanding of history. Hegel argues for theoretical apprehension of the past and Kierkegaard for the active creation of the future. Hegel believes that reason governs history and Kierkegaard argues in favour of a free and undetermined history. States and structured communities have historical primacy over individuals for Hegel and for Kierkegaard it is exactly the opposite. Hegel places God within this actual universe, Kierkegaard considers God as the absolute that grounds that universe.

If, thus, we want to have a complete picture of history, we need first to be aware of the limits of this picture. Hegel and Kierkegaard can give us these limits by their differing views about history. This is why it is useful to examine these together.

The second question is whether we can really relate one to another, because, thus far, it looks as if their claims on history are incompatible. And if this is the case, we cannot possibly examine them together. My answer is no, their views on history are not incompatible, they are complementary. Hegel

provides a holistic view and Kierkegaard provides us with an analysis of the basic elements of history. We need both views to arrive at a more complete picture.

A further reason to examine their views on history together is that in this way we can test their views by using the arguments of the one against the other. In order to test the philosophical strength of Hegel's claim that reason governs history, we can use Kierkegaard's arguments about the predominance of freedom within history. In order to test Hegel's claim that we can acquire knowledge of the past, we can use Kierkegaard's arguments for the opposite. In order to examine more deeply Kierkegaard's claim about individuals being the only historical agents, we can use Hegel's arguments that history can be created only by wholes such as states and structured societies.

Even however if we accept the need to examine them together, do we have to come up with a synthesis of their views? What if they simply represent two views on history that are ultimately and necessarily contradictory? My answer is that it is 'fruitless' to describe and understand their views in this way. It is so because we can proceed with a synthesis of their views. This will allow us to take advantage of both of the views. Only if we can absolutely prove that either Hegel's view or Kierkegaard's view is totally and uniquely correct, must we accept only one of these views. Otherwise, we can attempt to synthesise and combine their views, because this is a productive and legitimate philosophical way of using their thoughts.

### **Synthesis of their metaphysical claims**

We will start with their metaphysical claims. Can we synthesise Hegel's necessity with Kierkegaard's freedom? Can we combine reason as the

absolute historical agent with the Kierkegaardian historical human self as the only historical agent?

Starting with the first question, yes we can. Hegel's necessity can be understood as a 'teleological' necessity. This means that what is historically necessary is not a history predetermined by either logical or physical necessities. What is historically necessary is a purposeful and meaningful history. We can have such a history even without logical or natural laws. We can thus, have such a history with freedom existing within it.<sup>141</sup>

Now, someone might argue that if this is the case, then Hegel is absolutely right because his views incorporate Kierkegaard's view. My answer is that Hegel argues that we do know what history's purpose is, but I argue that we cannot know that for sure and Kierkegaard provides us with the relevant arguments in the 'Interlude'. What we can claim is that even without knowing the specific necessary end of history we can argue in favour of a history that, at the end, will have a meaning. Hegel argues that history necessarily must have a certain end. Kierkegaard argues that the future is uncertain and we cannot possibly know its end. I argue that a possible synthesis of their views can give us a better alternative. We can expect that the history we will make through our actions and decisions will have the shape (and thus the meaning) of our conscious effort. History then can be seen as something free that has as its core the necessity of free self-creation.

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<sup>141</sup> In fact, our modern and 'scientific' way to understand nature is quite similar. We accept that 'nature' evolves by trying to create more complicated forms of life without having to believe that nature follows any strictly predetermined patterns. Freedom in nature coexists comfortably with natural ends (or natural evolution). History then can be seen as something which freely evolves aiming to create meanings. These meanings are not predetermined but nevertheless they render history as something that eventually acquires a certain importance for the human beings who are experiencing historical evolution. These historical meanings while they are the direct product of human (historical) freedom, create a history which is meaningful without being predetermined.

Hegel in the end provides us with a view on history that makes human beings simply an instrument to reason. Kierkegaard on the other hand limits history to subjective will. We can proceed on a further synthesis that will accept both a necessary historical function and individual human freedom.

To explain: Which is the original, authentic and ultimate historical agent, reason or individual? My answer is neither of them but at the same time both of them. Hegel's reason in the end is something that arises out of the active participation of individuals. In this way the most crucial question to be asked is if this Hegelian reason exists or is it only a convenient theoretical abstraction. In Hegel's view the parts of a whole are grounded on the existence of this whole. We need first the existence of the whole to be able to grant existence to its parts. In Kierkegaard's point of view it is exactly the opposite.

What if, however, we cannot really understand one apart from the other? This is exactly my proposal. It is not the whole that grounds the parts; it is not the parts that ground the whole; both of them exist simultaneously.

If we insist to play the game 'who came first, the chicken or the egg' we are in danger of never arriving at an absolutely certain answer. Hegel's view underlines the importance of social relations in the construction of an individual human being. This is true. From the beginning of our conception we are a product of a bigger whole. First is our parents' uniting, then is our society's language and culture and so on. On the other hand, Kierkegaard also has his points. We can become authentic selves if and only if we self-consciously decide on our own. Yes we do need our parents and our society to start to exist, but what makes us individuals is our will to shape our unique entity through our unique decisions.

We cannot thus arrive at an exclusive result. Which is first, 'we' or 'I'? My proposed synthesis is that only if we decide to understand both of them as directly connected to each other can we have a better philosophical result. If we cannot, philosophically, prove the absolute truth of either of these claims, we can choose, philosophically, to consider them united and indivisible through and through.

It might be argued that, when the whole is constructed, then its function surpasses the individual functions. The human body has millions of cells but when it functions normally as a whole, its function is something else and something 'bigger' than the mere sum of its cells, and thus the human body transcends the individual functions of its cells. This is true but partly irrelevant to Kierkegaard's argument. One part of Kierkegaard's argument is indeed that every community (as a separate entity from its parts) is nothing but a convenient theoretical abstraction and so we cannot claim that these communities exist separately from their parts. This however, does not mean that Kierkegaard rejects even the existence of these communities. His point is simply to stress that these communities cannot exist without depending on their parts. Besides that, Kierkegaard's argument does not deny the importance of these communities. What he vigorously denies is that these communities can in fact have historical primacy over their individual parts.

Hegel stresses that structured communities can rationalise the 'irrational' individual passions through their laws. Hegel thus believes that if history has to have any rationality, this rationality can be found only within the laws of structured communities. Kierkegaard on the other side seeks to find authenticity within each and every single one human being. This authenticity



is in danger whenever individuals 'unload' their personal responsibilities to be authentic human selves through being simply parts of the 'crowd'.

If the above mentioned argument in favour of the indivisibility of the whole and its parts is purely theoretical, there is another (actual and historical) reason for trying to make a synthesis of the Hegelian primacy of the community and the respective Kierkegaardian primacy of the individual. The practical consequences of either Hegel's view or Kierkegaard's can lead us respectively either to totalitarian regimes or to the dissolution of social bonds.

Hegel would argue that the former could never happened because he stresses specifically that states must have as their necessary aim the protection of individual rights. In fact, he states that history's own end is that all men are free. The problem is (and here Kierkegaard's arguments do help us to spot it) that whenever we believe that states have historical primacy over their citizens we find ourselves ending in states like Hitler's and Stalin's.

Kierkegaard on the other side would argue that the dissolution of the social bonds could never happen because individuals do find themselves in the (objective and thus necessary) general social context of their time and so a (necessary) part of their selves is living with other individuals in structured communities.

Kierkegaard's approach nevertheless leaves us with two very important problems: either a) we try to become selves grounding our existence only in God and therefore the ultimate individual interest always lies in something outside our world, or b) we see our communities as something that exists only to serve our individual needs.

Starting with the latter, the problem is quite obvious. We will eventually find our societies being totally divided into separate individual wills without having any possibility of establishing a dynamic social bond between these individuals. If the danger of the crowd is a real one, equally real is the danger of social decomposition. As for the first side of the problem, whenever we ultimately turn to something totally different from us (and Kierkegaard's God is the ultimately different) in order to ground ourselves, we have to face the possibility of having no ground at all. Even worse, we face the possibility of turning our back on our actual (social and historical) needs. God's transcendence in Kierkegaard's thought constitutes the absolute centre of our (historical) existence. Can we however have a normal and functional social existence, if we believe that we cannot ground this social existence only in ourselves who constitute it?

For all the above mentioned reasons I argue that we cannot follow either Hegel or Kierkegaard. We need both of them. We need to be able to create bigger wholes than ourselves and we need also to permanently fight against any kind of oppression of our individual human rights by the state. Human history in fact has proved to be a permanent struggle between these two needs.

Hegel can turn us into obedient puppets of his reason and Kierkegaard can lock us at the deepest cells of our individuality. We cannot do, however, without both our social dimension and our individuality. At the end, their metaphysical claims are useful as long as we can synthesise them, otherwise we are doomed to live a one-dimensional historical existence.

### **Synthesis of their epistemological claims**

Hegel and Kierkegaard appear to make contradictory epistemological claims. Hegel argues that we can understand our historical past (in fact he calls that understanding 'absolute notion' in *PS*) and Kierkegaard argues that we can never acquire this kind of historical knowledge. Furthermore, Hegel in his introduction to *Philosophy of Right* says emphatically that all we can have from history is this knowledge of the past, while Kierkegaard claims that we should be interested in deciding about our future instead of trying to acquire historical knowledge.

Is it really possible to create a legitimate (philosophically) synthesis of their views, while it looks as if their claims are utterly contradictory? My answer is yes, we can. My point is that we can use Kierkegaard to 'amend' Hegel and we can, at the end, accomplish a synthesis of their epistemological claims.

Hegel's claim about our historical knowledge refers always to the past without arguing that we can possibly know what will happen in the future. In fact Hegel argues that we cannot even use our previous historical knowledge in order to change our future:

Rulers, statesmen and nations are often advised to learn the lesson of historical experience. But what experience and history teach is this—that nations and governments have never learned anything from history or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it. Each age and each nation finds itself in such peculiar circumstances, in such a unique situation, that it can and must make decisions with reference to itself alone...Amid the pressure of great events, a general principle is of no help, and it is not enough to look back on similar situations [in the past]; for pale recollections

are powerless before the stress of the moment, and impotent before the life and freedom of the present. (The instruction to be gained from history is not to be found in any reflections we may base on it. No two instances are exactly alike; they are never sufficiently identical for us to say that what was best on one occasion will also be best on another. Each nation has its own problems, and there is no need to look to history to discover the correct course. (*IPH*, 21).<sup>142</sup>

What follows from the above mentioned statement is that Hegel's idea of knowledge refers only to the past and that this knowledge is totally a philosophical knowledge of the purpose and the meaning of the historical past. Even with this (necessary) explication, Hegel still claims that we can know and understand the 'why' of history. By interrogating the rational dialectical process of our past we can arrive at a secure knowledge of history's purpose. But I am afraid that in the end this is 'wishful thinking' by itself. His presupposition that freedom is the ultimate end of history remains purely a presupposition. He has no way of proving that his interpretation is anything else but an interpretation and nothing more.

Kierkegaard's arguments against finding any hidden necessities within history can help us understand better where Hegel's fault lies. We do not have only to deal with mere historical occurrences; we have to interpret them also. In this (necessary) interpretation lies the very problem of acquiring knowledge of the

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<sup>142</sup> I quote such a long extract from Hegel's *IPH* because I believe that here Hegel emphatically defines his opinion on the use of historical knowledge. We do not try to know our past in order to use this knowledge in dealing with future events. Hegel's knowledge is purely the philosophical knowledge of the meaning and the purpose of the historical past. The present and the future are open and they will not allow us to use our historical knowledge upon them.

‘why’ in history. Kierkegaard argues (very effectively in my opinion) that we cannot come to a unique and totally necessary conclusion regarding the ‘why’ of history. Hegel cannot prove that he absolutely knows any ‘why’.

Kierkegaard’s view, on the other hand, that if we want to overcome doubt we have to use our will, does not imply that we can arbitrarily create our historical knowledge. Kierkegaard simply stresses the fact that we will always have to will in order to overcome the doubt that relative historical knowledge brings. If historical knowledge cannot provide beyond any possible doubt the reason why something happened in one way rather than another, we must exercise our will to believe that something happened in a particular way.

Every actuality is one actualised possibility among infinite numbers of possibilities. Kierkegaard then is right (in my opinion) to argue that we can never explain through knowledge the reason that a historical fact occurred rather than another. In this way, Kierkegaard stresses the need for us to decide about our present and our future. This claim is an existential and not an epistemological claim, but it is grounded in Kierkegaard’s former epistemological argument.

Do we have then to stop trying to acquire historical knowledge? Do we have to abandon our epistemological interest in knowing our past? My answer is no, we can continue our epistemological effort, while understanding the limits of our epistemological knowledge. Kierkegaard here can be used to ‘amend’ Hegel’s view, i.e. Kierkegaard can help us look at our history with our eyes on the future. Our interest in history must lie in deciding about our future goals. For Kierkegaard, history is something that is always connected to our care

and our interests. History cannot be defined only as the effort to bring to light hidden purposes of the past.

We need Hegel's view in order to be able to understand better and more deeply the forces that shaped our past. We need Hegel's view in order to relate more deeply to our historical past. Searching for meanings and purposes is a crucial part of our history. We need Kierkegaard's view also, because otherwise we will find ourselves having a future empty of our own interests. Hegel makes human individuals look quite unimportant in the making of history. States and reason always have the last word. In this way, we face the danger of not even trying to create our personal history. Kierkegaard gives us the most important role in history. Even if we are small and insignificant in the general course of history and do not belong to the 'elite' of the 'world-leaders', we still have to make our own personal historical decisions.

Hegel's view of history translates everything into a 'reflective' game. We reflect on our past, this is the best that we can do. Kierkegaard's view neglects the general historical forces and concentrates purely on human individuals. It seems then that, if we do not try to synthesise their views, we cannot find a middle ground where we can combine every single active historical force so as to have a more complete historical knowledge.

I argue that we need to try always to realise that history begins with personal actions and decisions but history is ultimately shaped by other powers. We must then have simultaneously two dimensions in our historical research: a) the dimension of personal active involvement and b) the dimension of the

existence of general currents that are shaping our history under the surface of personal aspirations.

Hegel and Kierkegaard underline different aspects of our existence. Hegel's stress is on the social dimension of our lives. Kierkegaard's stress is on the personal dimension of our existences. We need both of them in order to have a complete existence. Ultimately, if we put them against each other we mutilate our historical existence. If we consider them irrelevant to each other we remove the possibility of them giving us a deeper understanding of our selves.

#### Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel re-reconsidered

My thesis regarding the relations of Hegel's philosophy of history to Kierkegaard's approach to history is that: a) they do represent opposite approaches to history and the historical without however being incompatible or incomparable and irrelevant to each other and b) both thinkers are equally needed for a more complete picture of history and the historical and a synthesis of their views on history is philosophically both legitimate and profitable.

In order however to defend my thesis in the best possible way, I have to closely examine these theses that contradict my two claims. Thulstrup argues that Hegel and Kierkegaard are totally opposite to each other and thus utterly incompatible. I do not agree with him. Stewart on the other hand claims that Hegel does philosophy while Kierkegaard is interested in theology and thus we cannot compare them. For Stewart these two thinkers are utterly irrelevant to each other and thus I do not agree with Stewart either.

Sartre recognises the need to arrive at a synthesis of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's views on history but he never proceeds to any possible one and thus he (partly) opposes the second part of my thesis.

Taylor talks about the possibility of a synthesis but he nevertheless argues that Hegel is the one who can give us a better grasp on history and the historical and thus he opposes my claim that both Hegel and Kierkegaard are equally needed for a more complete picture of the nature of history and the historical.

James Bogen, Peter J. Mehl, Merold Westphal, and P. Christopher Smith also deal with the problem of the nature of the relations between Hegel's view on history and Kierkegaard's approach to history. Their claims also differ (partly or totally) from mine and thus I have also to defend my thesis against their arguments.<sup>143</sup>

### **Niels Thulstrup**

Both Thulstrup and Stewart examine the general philosophical relations between the overall philosophies of Hegel and Kierkegaard. The object of the current research however is about their thoughts on history. This means that I will limit my own discussion of their arguments insofar as they relate to the nature of history and the historical.

Thulstrup argues that Hegel and Kierkegaard are utterly incompatible.

He stresses that:

We must not, then, let ourselves be distracted by the many purely verbal (terminological) similarities between Kierkegaard and Hegel,

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<sup>143</sup> I choose to cite the claims of the above mentioned thinkers here in a separate section because I want to strongly point out their oppositions to my claims. In this way I believe that: a) I will do justice to their theses by presenting them separately from my own thesis and b) I will be able to defend better my claims by opposing them directly with every different claim from the relevant bibliography.



any more than, as for example, by his tripartite anthropological definitions in *The Concept of Dread* and in other writings, which to a cursory view could bring to mind the famous Hegelian triads.<sup>144</sup>

Even if Thulstrup is right in his claim that Kierkegaard merely uses similar verbal (terminological) schemes to Hegel, this merely verbal similarity, could be an indication of a kind of relation of Kierkegaard to Hegel. Thulstrup carries the burden to prove his claims but he neglects to give us his proofs. He merely states that: 'The complete disharmony is evident in every point...'<sup>145</sup> Further on Thulstrup mentions that Hegel believes that history 'advances in "quantitative determinations", which for Kierkegaard means that there can be no talk of responsibility in this history...'<sup>146</sup>

I agree with Thulstrup that Kierkegaard's claim about the historical agency of individuals contradicts Hegel's claim about the historical primacy of reason. Kierkegaard indeed underlines the individual's historical participation which brings also the individual's historical responsibility. That does not prove however that Hegel and Kierkegaard have 'incompatible' views on that matter. We can have a synthesis of both views if we can understand that Hegel on the one hand focuses on the matter of the general historical outcome of a past period while Kierkegaard underlines the individual's responsibility in the creation of future history. More than that, their views are compatible because: a) both of them examine the same object, i.e. history, b) they represent different but not contradictory views on the historical phenomenon (Hegel examines history as macrocosm and Kierkegaard focuses on history as

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<sup>144</sup> Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, translated by George L. Stengren, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 355.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 355.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p.357.

microcosm) and c) although it is true that they disagree on the matter of who has historical agency (reason or individuals), both of them believe that 'people are free' (Hegel argues that this is history's end and Kierkegaard claims that history is made freely by individuals).

Thulstrup rightly emphasises that Kierkegaard in the 'Interlude' gives us his thoughts on the nature of history without however constructing a philosophy of history as Hegel does.<sup>147</sup> He fails however to understand that Kierkegaard's arguments in *PF*, *CA*, *SUD* and *TA* can be viewed as a plausible main examination of history and the historical. In fact, he does not even analyse *CA* and *TA*. His analysis is completed with the examination of *CUP*.

Thulstrup, besides this omission, fails completely to be aware of Kierkegaard's complex and multiple relations to Hegel's philosophy.<sup>148</sup>

### **Jon Stewart**

Stewart quotes an extract from Kierkegaard's notes where Kierkegaard states that: 'I feel what for me at times is an enigmatic respect for Hegel;'<sup>149</sup> Stewart also quotes at the end of this extract: 'But, nevertheless, it is no less true that someone who is really tested in life, who in his need resorts to thought, will find Hegel comical despite all his greatness.'<sup>150</sup>

Here, in my opinion, we can detect Kierkegaard's ambivalence to Hegel in general. This attitude is a general characteristic of Kierkegaard's approach to Hegel's philosophy, i.e. he acknowledges Hegel's philosophical 'greatness',

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, pp. 362-364.

<sup>148</sup> On this point see also: Henning Fenger's chapter 'Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Niels Thulstrup' pp. 132-149, from his book *Kierkegaard, The Myths and their origins, Studies in the Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters*, translated by George C. Schoolfield, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980). Fenger argues that Thulstrup is wrong regarding the relations of Kierkegaard to Hegel, because Kierkegaard in the years 1835-43 was having a rather multi-layer response to Hegel's philosophy.

<sup>149</sup> *JP*, vol. 2, 1608; *Pap.* VI B 54.12. It is quoted in Jon Stewart's *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 18.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

but at the same time he believes that whoever is 'tested in life' has to find Hegel comical.

Hegel ultimately fails, for Kierkegaard, to understand that 'existence' (actual life), cannot be completely explained by theories, even the most insightful ones. In *CUP* Kierkegaard states that:

The thinker who in all his thinking can forget to think conjointly that he is existing does not explain existence; he makes an attempt to cease to be a human being, to become a book or an objective something that only a Munchhausen can become...Even if a man his whole life through occupies himself exclusively with logic, he still does not become logic; he himself therefore exists in other categories... [E]xistence mocks the one who keeps on wanting to become purely objective. (*CUP*, 93).

Stewart also fails to understand that Kierkegaard's claims in the 'Interlude' are attacking Hegel's claims about the 'absolute notion' of history. Stewart claims that Kierkegaard (or Climacus) in the 'Interlude' attacks Martensen's doctrine of immanence, so we cannot argue that Hegel's claims on the nature of history is under any attack.<sup>151</sup>

Stewart argues that Kierkegaard's claims on necessity within existence cannot possibly be a refutation of Hegel's relevant views. He claims that when Kierkegaard argues against the claim that: 'necessity is the unity of possibility and actuality' he argues against Kant and not against Hegel. Stewart rightly points out that Hegel speaks of a more elaborate and complicated relation

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, pp. 355-377.

between necessity, possibility and actuality.<sup>152</sup> He fails however to understand the philosophical implications of another of Hegel's statement that he quotes: 'It is true that necessity has been rightly defined as the unity of possibility and actuality.'<sup>153</sup>

Hegel here specifically takes this definition as 'right'. Even if Stewart is correct, and Kierkegaard is mainly attacking Kant, Hegel is also rejected here. Stewart cannot argue that Hegel has a more complicated view on that matter and thus cannot be rejected here, because Hegel also considers the definition of necessity as the 'unity of possibility and actuality' to be a correct one.

In general Stewart fails to understand—or fails to acknowledge—that we do not need to argue specifically against someone in order to reject him. All we need to do is to argue against positions that are common to many different philosophers and by doing so, we reject at the same time all these philosophers that share the same positions that are under attack. We do not therefore have to find out whether Kierkegaard argues against Martensen; all we need to do is to examine if the Kierkegaardian claims can be used also as arguments against Hegel.

We do not need, for example, to know if Kierkegaard's claim that necessity cannot be brought into the past by knowing (apprehending theoretically) this past aims at Martensen specifically. All we need to know is that Hegel clearly claims that we can detect necessity in the past if we examine this past philosophically (his famous owl of Minerva in the introduction of *PR* denotes emphatically Hegel's claim). Even if Kierkegaard knew nothing about Hegel's position, we still have the philosophical right to consider his claim as a

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 358.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 357, the quotation is from Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, paragraph 147; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 330.

rejection of Hegel's position. Stewart's claims that Kierkegaard rejects simple knowledge of events instead of 'knowledge according to the Concept'<sup>154</sup> cannot be right, precisely because, for Hegel, we can know history's necessities. In *IPH* Hegel states again and again that we can know history (I have already quoted enough of these statements in my first chapter).

Stewart further argues that: 'The incarnation is not central to Hegel's theory of history...'<sup>155</sup> I do not agree. Hegel cannot ground his philosophy of history without the Incarnation.<sup>156</sup> Incarnation in fact, constitutes the ground of both Hegel and Kierkegaard's arguments on history. Their crucial difference lies in the fact that for Hegel Incarnation can make us recognise within us our cognitive ability to arrive at a historical knowledge of history's aims and history's meaning while for Kierkegaard Incarnation represents the absolute paradox.

Stewart goes on to argue regarding the critique of 'the absolute method' by Kierkegaard in the 'Interlude' (*PF*, 78), that:

At most the critical comments about "the absolute method" can be conceived as a metalevel critique about what philosophy is and what sort of an account it can give (i.e., a conceptual account of history or a personal account of the ethical life of the individual).<sup>157</sup>

Even if Stewart is right, we still have to accept that this 'metalevel' critique is still a critique. Kierkegaard here argues specifically against Hegel. We cannot invalidate the Kierkegaardian rejection of the absolute method on the ground of being 'metalevel'. More than this, Kierkegaard states beyond any doubt that

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 365.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 368.

<sup>156</sup> See the relevant quotation from *IPH* that I have quoted at the beginning of the section: 'Hegelian claims' in the current chapter. See also my whole argumentation in the first chapter.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 375.

Hegel's absolute method, when it is applied in historical sciences, is a 'fixed idea'. (PF, 78, in the same note that Stewart refers to).

Stewart concludes that: '...Hegel's doctrine of the modal categories is considerably different from what Climacus presents in the "Interlude"'.<sup>158</sup> His argument that for someone to oppose Kierkegaard against Hegel on that matter would be 'ahistorical' because 'it is clear that Kierkegaard's intent is to carry out a polemic against Martensen'<sup>159</sup> is characteristic of Stewart's refusal to accept the (very simple but totally valid philosophically) idea that we can argue against someone, even when we do not intend to, whenever our philosophical arguments go against his arguments.

Stewart's argument that Kierkegaard (or Vigilius Haufniensis) took the concept of the 'leap' from Hegel says nothing about the use of this concept by these two thinkers. Stewart admits that 'Kierkegaard develops this concept in his own way and puts it into a different context';<sup>160</sup> but he adds that '...the basic Hegelian meaning is still present...'.<sup>161</sup> Stewart of course aims to oppose directly Thulstrup's claim that Kierkegaard was wholly against Hegel. There is no doubt that Stewart succeeds in solidly grounding his rejection of Thulstrup's claim. Kierkegaard indeed has many levels and many ways to relate himself and his thought to Hegel's philosophy. What Stewart does not do however is to acknowledge that Kierkegaard mainly takes parts of Hegel's arguments and turns them against Hegel.

Even if the concept of leap has been taken from Hegel, Kierkegaard uses it to prove and signal the existence of historical freedom in contrast to the sphere

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 376.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 377.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 411.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 411.

of logic. Stewart admits it clearly, but he, nevertheless, does not follow the natural conclusion, i.e. he refuses to understand that when Kierkegaard uses the 'leap' in order to refer to historical existence denoting individual freedom of will and personal freedom of choice, he argues also against the use of the 'leap' in logic:

The sphere of historical freedom is presumably introduced to constitute a contrast to the sphere of logic. In the former, transition and movement take place in terms of radical qualitative leaps from one state to another. By contrast, in logic there is only a gradual quantitative increase or decrease but no real radical change in kind and thus no real movement.<sup>162</sup>

Stewart concludes by stating that Hegel does philosophy while Kierkegaard (being mainly a religious thinker) is interested in the religious life, so we cannot really take as serious philosophical arguments Kierkegaard's arguments against Hegel's philosophy.

In a sense one can see the difference between them in the simple fact that Hegel is primarily interested in doing philosophy (in the modern sense of conceptual analysis), whereas Kierkegaard is not...Kierkegaard, by contrast, is perhaps best seen as a religious thinker, who is interested in the religious life of the individual. While this is of course fully legitimate on its own terms, it is not philosophy.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p. 410.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 418.

Stewart here fails to acknowledge that Kierkegaard is offering us solid philosophical arguments.<sup>164</sup> Stewart, while fully exploring Kierkegaard's references (or possible allusions) to Hegel, cannot ultimately find common ground to relate them under the same object (philosophy).

It is understandable for someone to take a side in a conflict and thus it is understandable for Stewart to take the side of Hegel in the conflict of Kierkegaard and Hegel in the matters of 'existence', 'actuality' and 'faith'. What is not understandable here, however, is for Stewart to deny that is possible for Kierkegaard to respond to Hegel with legitimate and wholly valid philosophical arguments.

Stewart considers *The Sickness unto Death* as an attack on Martensen and as a general attack against the established church.<sup>165</sup> He gives us an amazingly elaborate analysis of Kierkegaard's use of dialectics in this text. I do agree with him that Hegel is not the main target of Kierkegaard's critique in *SUD*. My argument however (as it is displayed in the third chapter) is that Kierkegaard in *SUD* completes his arguments on history by giving us his structure of the human self. This self is inseparable from history and is grounded on the absolute 'other'. This absolutely different (God) grounds our (historical) existence. The very existence of despair can be explained as an (actual and thus historical) indication of this structure.

Stewart does not take into account that the Kierkegaardian analysis of the human self in *SUD* can be used as a philosophical argument against Hegel's claim that individuals are not the main historical agents. In fact, this is my

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<sup>164</sup> The point of this thesis is exactly that we can use (philosophically) Kierkegaard's thought on history, even if his first concern is to understand what is to live a truly religious life. It goes without saying that I bear the burden to prove the truthfulness of my claims. I hope that by now I have succeeded.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, pp. 594-595.



general critique of Stewart's effort: he fails to acknowledge the philosophical implications of Kierkegaard's arguments against Hegel's philosophy of history. In fact, Kierkegaard's philosophical value can be proved through the help he gives us to find the (possible) errors in Hegel's philosophy. We need Kierkegaard's philosophical arguments to be able to point out possible Hegelian philosophical defects. More than that, we need Kierkegaard to have a different view of Hegel's (possible) incompleteness:

A thinker erects a huge building, a system, a system embracing the whole of existence, world history, etc., and if his personal life is considered, to our amazement the appalling and ludicrous discovery is made that he himself does not personally live in this huge, domed palace but in a shed alongside it, or in a doghouse, or at best in the janitor's quarters. Were he to be reminded of this by one single word, he would be insulted. For he does not fear to be in error if he can only complete the system—with the help of being in error. (SUD, 43-44).

### **Jean-Paul Sartre**

Sartre on the other side understands Kierkegaard's possible philosophical use: 'It must be borne in mind that this opposition between foreseen and lived experience was made manifest around 1850 in the opposition between Hegel and Kierkegaard.'<sup>166</sup> Sartre stresses that Hegel and Kierkegaard articulate two different ontological visions.<sup>167</sup> Sartre thus, recognises the philosophical significance of Kierkegaard's thought. As Stewart rightly states, Hegel and

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<sup>166</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, translated by John Mathews, (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1979), 'Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal', p. 143.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

Kierkegaard do approach the problems of this world differently, but this does not render Kierkegaard's approach 'non-philosophical'.

Dealt with in advance by Hegel, subjectivity becomes a moment of the objective spirit, a determination of culture. But if nothing of lived experience can elude knowledge, its reality remains irreducible.<sup>168</sup>

Sartre is right to point out the 'irreducibility' of personal existence, as a distinct trait of the Kierkegaardian philosophy. What he fails to mention however is the possibility of a synthesis of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's views. Sartre insists on stressing the ontological hiatus between Hegel's and Kierkegaard's thought without leaving us any possibility of finding a common ground somewhere in the middle. He implies however the need to try to synthesise their views on history when he gives us his explanation of these views in this way:

... [I]n an individual the rationality of History is experienced irreducibly as madness, as an inner accident, expressive of random encounters... Man, irremediable singularity, is the being through whom the universal comes into the world; once fundamental chance starts to be lived, it assumes the form of necessity. Lived experience, we discover in Kierkegaard, is made up of non-significant accidents of being in so far as they are surpassed towards a significance they did not possess at the beginning...<sup>169</sup>

Sartre argues that on the one hand we have the epistemological apprehension of history in Hegel, while on the other hand Kierkegaard argues in favour of the irreducibility of individual existence to any cognitive apprehension. He is able to understand that we do need a synthesis of both of

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

these views in order for us to arrive at a more complete understanding of history but he never proceeds to provide any such synthesis.

### **Mark C. Taylor**

Mark C. Taylor argues that:

In a certain sense, Hegel brings modern philosophy to completion by transforming Descartes' turn to the subject into a comprehensive speculative system in which epistemology and ontology are creatively integrated to form absolute subjectivity, which simultaneously constitutes and surpasses individual selves. In Hegel's system, philosophy becomes the historical and history becomes philosophical.<sup>170</sup>

I agree that in Hegel's thought, history and philosophy directly refer to each other. Spirit acquires its self-knowledge through the historical process and this self-knowledge can (and ought to) be expressed better in theoretical (philosophical in Hegel's jargon) terms. I also agree with Taylor when he states that:

Kierkegaard, however, remained unconvinced of both the comprehensiveness and the comprehensibility of Hegelianism. In the machinations of the system, he detected traces of something that Hegel could neither escape nor comprehend... To think "beyond absolute knowledge," it is necessary to think otherness without reducing it to sameness and to think difference without reducing it to identity.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood, Hegel & Kierkegaard*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. ix.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, pp.x-xiii.

Kierkegaard indeed denies the (theoretical and actual) possibility of arriving at any kind of 'absolute knowledge'. History and the historical cannot be the object of any kind of absolute knowledge. What Taylor fails to acknowledge is that Kierkegaard is not arguing in favour of any kind of 'anti-social' tendencies. Taylor admits that: 'Kierkegaard does not deny that there are social dimensions of selfhood. As a matter of fact, he agrees with Hegel's characterization of spirit as at once universal and individual.'<sup>172</sup> He nevertheless concludes that: 'The birth of such spiritual individuality requires severing the umbilical cord of sociality through the difficult labor of differentiating self and other.'<sup>173</sup>

Taylor thus fails to understand that the creation of self as Kierkegaard analyses it, does not oppose society *per se*. Kierkegaard argues against the point of view that: a) gives primacy to communities over their members and b) the claim that being a self is, first of all, a collective procedure. Taylor, more than that, fails to fully capture Kierkegaard's stress on the need to ground ourselves (and thus our societies) in something totally different from us. Hegel insists that God (or the Absolute Spirit) lives continuously within our universe. In philosophical terms, Hegel and Kierkegaard argue in favour of different grounds.

It is not however, simply the problem of how I behave within my society, it is not even (only) the problem of where I ground my existence. Being a Self for Kierkegaard is a duty that freely creates the human self and its history.

Being an individual cannot even be expressed with Hegel's terminology and method. Being a Self, for Kierkegaard, is a matter of free will and free choice.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

If we decide, as Taylor does, to limit Kierkegaard's analysis of self in a religious procedure, we mutilate Kierkegaard's thought, because we fail to include the direct historical core of this self. If we decide to view Kierkegaard's analysis of self in terms of 'anti-social' tendency, we fail to understand that Kierkegaard makes a very crucial (philosophical) point: if we forget that selves must be created through personal individual decisions, we will eventually lose our authenticity. Being social remains, as Taylor admits, for Kierkegaard, a very important dimension of self-structure. Being an authentic and thus distinct (from every one else) self is the core of this self.

Taylor however, allows for a possible synthesis of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's view: 'It might, then, be possible to imagine a non-logo-centric logos, which is open rather than closed and thus leaves space and time for chance.'<sup>174</sup> Taylor however does not give us any such synthesis and he remains focused on the Hegelian arguments.

### **James Bogen**

James Bogen rightly points out that Hegel and Kierkegaard ground selfhood in different foundations.<sup>175</sup> He concludes that for Hegel, the individual cannot be a self by his own will and actions. The individual can acquire a self by being a part of reason.<sup>176</sup> My point is that neither Hegel's approach nor Kierkegaard's can represent on their own the 'totality' of the procedure of being a self. Hegel points to intersubjectivity; Kierkegaard underlines the irreducibility of our personal responsibility. We need however, a synthesis of these approaches if

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. xx.

<sup>175</sup> James Bogen, 'Remarks on the Kierkegaardian-Hegel Controversy', *Synthese*, (Vol. 13, No 4, Dec., 1961), pp. 372-389.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 385.

we want to arrive at a more complete understanding of the problem of the creation of the self.

### **Peter J. Mehl**

Peter J. Mehl is moving at the same direction (of a possible synthesis) when he tries to present to us with a possible 'reconstruction' of Kierkegaard's view on selfhood in a Hegelian manner.<sup>177</sup> My objection lies in his methodology. He chooses to explain Kierkegaard with Hegelian methods, without understanding the danger of mistreating Kierkegaard's view in this way. If Kierkegaard is explained in full Hegelian fashion we will significantly distort his philosophical points. We need (in my opinion) to first understand Kierkegaard's arguments in the general 'existential' context in which he uses them, and then try to proceed to a possible synthesis with Hegel's views.

Mehl however makes an interesting point that Kierkegaard:

... ]I]s compelled to postulate a transcendent standard as the only adequate measure because he thinks that the human desire for existential orientation can mean only ultimate security and final rest in the flux and contingency of everyday life.<sup>178</sup>

I also believe that Kierkegaard ultimately needs to find an objective ground of the flux and contingency of everyday life. Kierkegaard thus cannot complete the analysis of the human self without, in the end, resorting to an absolute. Both Hegel and Kierkegaard cannot avoid describing something that is supposed to be indescribable, i.e. they refer directly to an absolute. Hegel believes that his absolute is approachable and describable because it refers to a theoretical construction and Kierkegaard roots his approach in the

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<sup>177</sup> Peter J. Mehl, *Thinking through Kierkegaard, Existential Identity in a Pluralistic World*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

acceptance of the paradox. My point is that both of them are confined within the limits of their own final aims without understanding that what they analyse is not the whole picture but specific fragments of it.

### **Merold Westphal**

Merold Westphal gives us strong arguments against those who believe that Kierkegaard's thought is 'asocial'.<sup>179</sup> Westphal rightly points out that Kierkegaard is against the social tendency which results in the deification of society which in the end 'dehumanizes' and 'demonizes' itself. As Westphal states:

Modern society deifies itself by taking itself to be the absolute point of reference both for itself and for its individual members. It dehumanizes itself by becoming mass society, a herd from which the individual in any ethically or religiously significant sense has been eliminated. The result is a demonic monster as powerful as it is unprincipled...<sup>180</sup>

Kierkegaard cannot be blamed for being (or telling us to be) asocial. Kierkegaard's thoughts on politics however share common traits with Hegel's thoughts and that is something we should bear in mind whenever we want to understand his views on the nature of the relations between society and its members. Kierkegaard recognises that human beings have to live together by generating social bonds between them.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, (Pensylvania: The Pensylvania State University Press, 1991), see in particular 'Kierkegaard's Politics' pp.29-42 and 'Inwardness and Ideology Critique in Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript' pp. 105-125.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>181</sup> See third chapter, especially the analysis of the 'Present Age' from *TA*.

What is crucial however for our analysis is that, by understanding that Kierkegaard's structure of self does not deprive it of its social context, we can have a better apprehension of Kierkegaard's opposition to some implications of Hegel's claim that structured communities have historical primacy over their members. As Westphal argues: 'The fatal flaw of the Hegelian philosophy and of his 'present age' is a tendency toward self-deification of the We.'<sup>182</sup>

Kierkegaard's belief that our existence is grounded in something totally different and outside us (God) is his answer to Hegel's belief that his system has achieved systematic (theoretical) finality, which, for Kierkegaard, is a kind of deification of Hegel's (theoretical) system. As Westphal underlines: 'Thus the claim of the Hegelian system to have achieved systematic finality is a thinly disguised attempt to claim divine status for this particular expression of human wisdom.'<sup>183</sup>

Kierkegaard's critique of mass society is a critique against certain philosophical implications which necessarily follow from Hegel's 'apotheosis' of states and structured communities. On the other hand, Hegel's analysis of the historical importance of societies and of the relational (social) nature of individual selves is an answer to the problems that any kind of 'individualism' must, at the end, face. Hegel and Kierkegaard thus, need each other to accomplish a more complete and fair picture of the relations between societies and individuals. The crucial aim of any possible synthesis of their views on that relation would be to secure both the significance and authenticity of the individuals and the political role of their communities. Otherwise, we will end either in totalitarianism or in social insularism.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 37.



Westphal fails to acknowledge that Hegel's views are as equally necessary and important as Kierkegaard's. He is right to 'use' Kierkegaard's arguments to point out the possible dangers of Hegel's approach, he is not right however to refuse to see that Kierkegaard also presents us with one-sided views. Westphal argues that ultimately Kierkegaard is the only one who can give us the right perspective in regard to the relations of the 'I' and the 'we'. I argue that we fail to fully understand the relations between individuals and their communities when we choose to focus only either on the individuals or their societies.

### **Unhappy consciousness**

There is a final question that we need to address when we try to understand the relations between Hegel and Kierkegaard. Hegel in *PS* describes a certain kind of self-consciousness which is unable to grasp that is utterly united with the objects of its thoughts. Hegel calls this self-consciousness an 'unhappy consciousness'. It is unhappy because it cannot fill the gap between itself as a thinking subject and its thoughts as its objects. This 'unhappy consciousness' thus, is doomed, in Hegel's opinion, to never being 'satisfied' because of this internal and permanent hiatus. As Hegel states: '... the *Unhappy Consciousness* is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being.' (*PS*, 126, italics are not mine).

Is then Kierkegaard an 'unhappy consciousness', who is unable to find peace and satisfaction because he cannot unite himself as a thinking subject and his thoughts (about history and the historical for the purposes of the current analysis)? If the answer is yes, Hegel's theoretical system incorporates

Kierkegaard's thought and thus, we have solved once and for all the problem of their relations.

Sartre by underlining the irreducibility of Kierkegaard's stance says no to the above mentioned question. The central argument of this current analysis is also that Kierkegaard represents the limits of Hegel's system and Hegel does the same for Kierkegaard's thought. Kierkegaard thus cannot be absorbed in Hegel's 'absolute system' and Hegel cannot be nullified or invalidated by Kierkegaard's arguments. We need both of them in order for us to arrive to a 'fuller picture'.

P. Christopher Smith examines the same question and his answer is that it: '... is in fact Kierkegaard who incorporates Hegel... Kierkegaard has... shattered Hegel's claim to infinite absolute knowledge and broken out of the hold of philosophical reflection.'<sup>184</sup> Smith underlines that Kierkegaard can show us the fact that '... Hegel in staying on the conscious surface of the phenomenon cannot penetrate to the unconscious depths of it.'<sup>185</sup> Smith thus refuses even to see the possibility of a synthesis. For him, Kierkegaard, through his analysis of despair, shows us that such 'unhappiness' is not the result of 'self-conscious' thoughts but: '... such unhappiness and self-abasement is precisely the self's unwillingness to abandon its finite self humbly to God's forgiveness.'<sup>186</sup>

Smith here by referring to Kierkegaard's analysis of despair as an analysis that incorporates Hegel's thought, makes us understand a very interesting point. If we believe that either Hegel is utterly and completely right or if we

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<sup>184</sup> *Hegel, History, and Interpretation*, edited by Shaun Gallagher, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 'Hegel, Kierkegaard, and the Problem of Finitude' by P. Christopher Smith, p. 226.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, p. 225.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, p. 225.

believe that Kierkegaard is so, we will necessarily end by admitting that either Hegel or Kierkegaard incorporates the other.

This gives us another reason to try to stay away from such views. We have already discussed the dangers that lie within 'absolute' points of view. The only way to avoid such dangers is on the one hand to refuse to regard either Hegel or Kierkegaard as the only and the wholly 'possessor' of the truth and on the other hand to try to proceed to a synthesis of their views.

### Epilogue

Instead of any further arguments or analysis I would like Hegel and Kierkegaard to 'write' my epilogue. In the following citations both thinkers recognise that faith and philosophy (philosophy and faith) are sturdily interconnected. If this is how these two thinkers view philosophy and faith, then the prospect of absolutely binding Hegel to philosophy and Kierkegaard to faith is utterly deceptive and the possibility of synthesising their views becomes even more legitimate.

... man has a natural sense or consciousness of a supersensible world and an obligation to the divine. If nothing whatever in our own hearts responded to an external challenge to virtue and religion, if there were no strings in our own nature from which this challenge resounded, then Jesus' endeavor to inspire men to virtue and a better religion would have had the same character and the same outcome as St. Anthony of Padua's zeal in preaching to fish...<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox; with an introduction, and fragments translated by Richard Kroner, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 175.

If philosophy cannot define me more precisely, then to the best of my judgment its position does not become less unpleasant than mine and then, despite our great differences, we have a partnership. I am so obtuse that philosophy cannot become understandable to me. The opposite of this is that philosophy is so sagacious that it cannot comprehend my obtuseness.<sup>188</sup>

Faith can be a 'natural sense' and an 'obligation to the divine'. Hegel leaves the door open for something beyond philosophy. This duty, this natural disposition of human beings can play, does play a significant role in the shape of our world. It must be noted that Hegel here does not refer to religion as something inferior to philosophy. Human nature and human duty incorporate faith as one of their vital elements.

Kierkegaard (in his notoriously playful manner) speaks of a 'partnership' between his position and philosophy's. Ironical or not, Kierkegaard chooses to allow philosophy to become his interlocutor. Philosophy, even the 'over-sagacious' one, will always try to define Kierkegaard's claims; and Kierkegaard, obtuse or not, will always try to comprehend philosophy.

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<sup>188</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Prefaces, Writing Sampler*, edited and translated by Todd W. Nichol, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 58.

## Chapter Five

### Heidegger's response to the problem of history

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that Hegel's and Kierkegaard's responses to the problem of history are one-sided and a synthesis of their views is required in order to acquire a fuller and richer picture of the nature of history. Hegel points to knowledge of the past as the only objective feature of history, while Kierkegaard emphasises the role of personal choice in making history. A tension is created thus between an 'objective' and epistemological view of history and a 'subjective' and ethical one. Both views leave crucial elements of history out of their analysis of the nature of history.

The synthesis of their views is a way to try to do justice to the problem of history. In this way Hegel and Kierkegaard stop being treated merely as philosophical enemies<sup>189</sup> with contradictory views on history. Through synthesis we arrive at a more complete picture of the nature of history. This synthesis, however, must be able to fulfil one basic demand: the demand to present a full picture of the nature of history.<sup>190</sup>

Martin Heidegger argues that neither Hegel, nor Kierkegaard (nor even their synthesis), provide the appropriate approach to history. Heidegger argues that an adequate approach to the problem of history is not possible unless history

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<sup>189</sup> They do still offer opposed accounts of history. As however I tried to depict in my previous chapter, we can still use their accounts together in order for us to acquire a better understanding of their theories. In this way, Kierkegaard becomes a necessary interpretative key for Hegel's philosophy of history and Hegel can be used to unlock the Kierkegaardian approach to history.

<sup>190</sup> Somebody (like Heidegger for example) might argue that neither Hegel nor Kierkegaard can offer us any conclusive analysis of the problems of history and the historical. More than that, somebody might argue that although Hegel and Kierkegaard provide quite lucid answers to the questions, none of them were able to come with adequate historical methods.

is grasped neither as an object to be known by the faculties of our cognition nor as a personal (and thus purely subjective) adventure nor even as synthesis of both approaches. History, instead, is a matter of the most primary condition of human beings. He argues that the very procedure that makes human beings being human beings is their capacity to 'temporalise' their existence. Heidegger thus argues that history directly refers to the most basic function of human nature.

Heidegger therefore claims that we will fail to grasp history if we follow Hegel's or Kierkegaard's approaches (or even a synthesis of their approaches), first, because their methods do not properly analyse the nature of history and, second, because both of them fail to acknowledge the crucial role that history plays for human beings. Heidegger's answer to the problem of history (according to his view) at the same time contains and surpasses Hegel's and Kierkegaard's views on history.

Heidegger's views history neither as a matter of epistemology nor as a necessary production of personal choices, nor as an overall synthesis of both theories. While Heidegger (as we shall see) refers to both the communal and personal aspects of history, he makes a crucial philosophical shift away from history understood through relations of Subject-Object to history as ontologically grounded in the structure of being human. In this way, Heidegger presents a view of history that, while encompassing the Hegelian and the Kierkegaardian views, nevertheless approaches history in a quite different way from theirs. History for him is an ontological problem.

This is the reason why, in this thesis, I turn to Heidegger's approach separately from and after Hegel's and Kierkegaard's approaches. Heidegger

argues that his view is neither a supplementary one to theirs nor of the same philosophical ground.

In the first part of this chapter I give a close analysis of the Heideggerian approach focussing mainly in his texts *The Concept of Time*,<sup>191</sup> *History of the Concept of Time*,<sup>192</sup> and *Being and Time*.<sup>193</sup> In the second part I analyse the relation of the Heideggerian approach to the Hegelian and the Kierkegaardian approach. In the third and final part I present possible problems regarding his effort to redefine time and history.

### Part I

Heidegger considers metaphysics to be strictly connected to human existence: "Metaphysics is not some discipline of knowledge...metaphysics is a fundamental occurrence within human *Dasein*."<sup>194</sup> Heidegger thus understands metaphysics in a very different manner from either Hegel or Kierkegaard. For the last two, metaphysics is a distinct philosophical field quite distinct from human existence within the world.<sup>195</sup>

From *CT* onwards Heidegger aims to re-think and redefine the whole Western philosophical tradition from a totally new point of departure and in a fresh way.

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<sup>191</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, translated by William McNeill, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). (Hereafter *CT*).

<sup>192</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, translated by Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). (Hereafter *HCT*).

<sup>193</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). (Hereafter *BT*).

<sup>194</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>195</sup> 'Dasein' in the Heideggerian philosophical jargon always refers to human existence in the world. In this way, Heidegger puts metaphysics within human worldly existence.

Hegel regards metaphysics to be part of his own 'Logic' and considers it to be different from the mere human existence in the world. Although it can be argued that Hegel's 'metaphysics' is nothing but a part of this spatio-temporal world, my opinion is that Hegel's metaphysics are not specifically focused on the human existence. Hegel's 'absolute' exists within this world but does not refer (only) to human beings.

Kierkegaard on the other side considers metaphysics to be something that is totally 'disinterested' and thus something that is totally apart from the passionate human engagement with the world.

As Hannah Arendt boldly claims: 'Heidegger never thinks "about" something; he thinks something.'<sup>196</sup> We can detect here a basic element of Heidegger's philosophical enterprise. To think 'about' something means that thinking presupposes someone who thinks and something which is being thought and a necessary 'distance' between them. To 'think something' alludes to a possible overcoming of the ontological distance between a thinking subject and the object of this thinking.

Heidegger argues that every single philosophical effort, which tries to explain our experience of the world from the point of view of a thinking subject, falls short.<sup>197</sup> As Piotr Hoffman underlines:

The subjectivity of the self supplies both the point of departure and the validating ground for various philosophical attempts at a reconstruction of our knowledge of the world. One of Heidegger's aims in *Being and Time* was to question and to overcome this subjectivist tradition of modern philosophy.<sup>198</sup>

To be able to ask questions and ask them in the right way is always better than trying to answer questions which are asked unreflectively. Only through questioning, Heidegger argues, can we understand ourselves and our world more fundamentally. He states this point emphatically at the end of his

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<sup>196</sup> *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Michael Murray, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 296.

<sup>197</sup> Heidegger's essay *The Age of the World Picture*, can offer us a very illuminating example of Heidegger's approach. See for example what Heidegger states when he refers to modern sciences: 'But the establishing of a law is accomplished with reference to the ground plan of the object-sphere. That ground plan furnishes a criterion and constrains the anticipatory representing of the conditions.' Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 'The Age of the World Picture', translated by William Lovitt, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 121.

Heidegger argues that the way our 'project' is understood by us (here modern physics), presupposes in almost every aspect our methods and our conclusions. So he argues that: 'On the foundation of their character as ongoing activity, the sciences are creating for themselves the solidarity and unity appropriate to them.' Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>198</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to HEIDEGGER*, edited by Charles B. Guignon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 195.



lectures on the concept of time. The concluding words read: 'Then Dasein would be: being questionable.' (CT, 22E).

Therefore, one must always bear in mind these two basic traits of Heideggerian's thought, namely: his effort to bridge the gap between the subject and the object and his permanent insistence of doing philosophy within a purely aporetic context.<sup>199</sup> This provides the background to the opening of *BT* and its insistence on the 'necessity of explicitly restating the question of being.' (BT, 21). He is attempting to restate the question.

The main aspects of Heidegger's approach to history

The main aspects of the Heideggerian approach to the problem of history are:

- a) Time does not exist. Human beings (Dasein) create time or (putting it in the Heideggerian dialect) temporalise their existence through their 'care'.
- b) Human beings, while existing in the world, become authentic human beings only when they become conscious of the unavoidable fact of their personal death. When Dasein is confronted by the realisation of its certain and definite temporal end, it is able to fully and authentically grasp the meaning of its temporal existence.
- c) Dasein is historical in that history and temporality are the very modes of its existence.

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<sup>199</sup> Paul Ricoeur points out Heidegger's intentions when he states that Heidegger's analyses: 'are aimed at destroying the claim of a knowing subject to be the measure of objectivity.' *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, p. 153. Hans-Georg Gadamer specifies even further this by stating that for Heidegger: 'The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship in which exist both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding.' Ibid, p. 183. Nullifying the distance between subject and object does not amount to a Hegelian union of the subject and the object. Heidegger, as both Ricoeur and Gadamer underline, tries to create a 'proper hermeneutics.' Here his 'aporia' functions as the main force which makes us continuously proceeding further and deeper into our hermeneutical effort.

d) History is therefore interconnected to Dasein and its nature.<sup>200</sup>

### Time

As we have already pointed out, especially when we examined Kierkegaard's concept of history, in order to unravel the perplexities of history, we first have to approach the problem of time. Heidegger's strategy is similar. Before even mentioning history, he focuses on the concept of time.<sup>201</sup> He begins with an Aristotelian definition of time: 'Time is that within which events take place.' (CT, 3E). He then goes on to cite recent developments in physics (Einstein's relativity theory), namely: 'Time...is nothing. It persists merely as a consequence of the events taking place in it.' (CT, 3E). His point here is to connect the philosophical-ontological definition of Aristotle with the scientific definition, in order to flag up the theoretical concurrence of these two approaches. For both of them time is nothing but the measurement of change. It exists merely as a second order symptom of the changes (or the 'events' in Einstein's dialect).

Heidegger then proceeds to provide three separate understandings of 'times' (without, however, explaining why he considers them to be different or

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<sup>200</sup> 'Nature' here does not possess the connotations it does in Aristotle. We must be very careful about the use of the term 'nature' in Heidegger's philosophy. His whole effort is focused on trying to prove the 'dead end' of traditional ontology. Heidegger's 'nature' answers the 'how' and not the 'what'. Nature thus is not an essence but a necessary mode, an unavoidable 'way of being'.

<sup>201</sup> It should be noted here, that Heidegger works first on a conceptional clarification of time. He states first that: 'philosophy and science take place in the concept.' (CT, 2E). Before however someone starts considering Heidegger an absolute follower of Hegel, we must notice that Heidegger speaks negatively about this intellectual approach. In fact he almost taunts this approach to the problem of time by stating that: 'If we achieve clarity about what a clock is, then the kind of apprehension thriving in physics thereby becomes alive, and so does the manner in which time gets the opportunity to show itself.' (CT, 2E).

distinct), namely: a) 'the time that we encounter in everydayness', b) 'the time of nature' and c) 'world time'. (*CT*, 3E).<sup>202</sup>

On the back of this presentation, he goes to point out the philosophical 'deadlocks' which result from usual interpretations of time. If time is understood as 'clock-time' (nine o'clock in the morning for example), what exactly does this mean? What does it mean that time is what we see in our clocks? When we declare that 'now the time is...' to what feature of time do we refer to exactly?

Heidegger's intention here is to make apparent that on this understanding time always refers to 'now'. Yet, this 'now' is utterly indefinable and opaque. Such an 'everyday' temporality appears to be ultimately void of existence. And this is Heidegger's point: time cannot be approached by means of such naïve interpretations. But then, why do we need to have clocks? Are they not a definitive indication of the existence of time?

Heidegger refers to Augustine for his answer. It is not the objective existence of time that disposes us to create clocks. It is, instead, 'My very finding myself disposed...to what I measure when I measure time.' (*CT*, 6E). What is primary is the idea that the time of human beings is neither time itself nor the events which are taking place within space and time. We, as existing in the world as human beings (*Dasein*), are disposed to measure time. This disposition of ours is *Dasein*'s basic function.

Heidegger, then, is determined to approach the phenomenon of time through *Dasein* and not the other way around (as Aristotle and modern physics do).

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<sup>202</sup> The advantage of Heidegger's analysis of time in *CT* is that he always begins from our everyday understanding of time, without however losing from his sight the philosophical and the scientific exposition of the nature of time. It is almost shocking for the readers of Heidegger's *BT* to see the profound easiness with which Heidegger explores the problems of time in *CT*, without however missing to point out his philosophical aims.

The question of what time is has pointed our inquiry in the direction of Dasein, if by Dasein we mean that entity in its being which we know as human life; this entity in the *specificity* of its Being, the entity that we each ourselves are, which each of us finds in the fundamental assertion: I am. (CT, 6E).

In this way, Heidegger reverses the traditional methodological approach to the problem of time. Instead of considering the human disposition to measure time as a direct product of either an objective time or the occurrence of change, he defines time as the direct product of a primary human disposition. The most important (and necessary) outcome of Heidegger's approach is that we (Dasein) create time through our disposition to be Dasein. Time becomes something characteristically human. But then, what about so-called 'natural time'? Can we speak of natural time when we define time as something which is produced entirely by human disposition?

Nevertheless, the very heart of the Heideggerian approach to history is exactly that, Dasein is Dasein only and only when Dasein is 'being temporal'. In other words, this human disposition to temporality is the only authentic human disposition.

Heidegger repeatedly makes this claim. Thus we read:

Not "time is" but "*Dasein qua time temporalizes its being.*"<sup>203</sup> Time is not something which is found outside somewhere as a framework for world events. Time is even less something which whirs away inside in consciousness...The movement of nature which we define spatio-temporally, these movements do not flow

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<sup>203</sup> The italics belong to the text.

off 'in time' as 'in' a channel. They are as such completely time-free...They are encountered 'in' the time which we ourselves are. (*HCT*, pp.319-320).

We shall point to temporality as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call "Dasein". (*BT*, 38). Thus the fundamental ontological task of Interpreting Being as such includes working out the Temporality of Being. In the exposition of the problematic of Temporality the question of the meaning of Being will first be concretely answered. (*BT*, 40).

Time cannot be approached without dealing first with Dasein. Dasein's temporality is what produces time. In *BT*, Heidegger grounds his whole philosophical analysis on this presupposition. As Michael Allen Gillespie puts it: 'The specific task of *Being and Time*, according to Heidegger, was to raise the question of the meaning of Being (*Sein*) through an analysis of human Being (*Dasein*) in terms of temporality.'<sup>204</sup>

To conclude this section, time does not exist, either as an objective dimension or as a derivative result of substantial changes. 'Dasein, conceived in its most extreme possibility of Being, is time itself, not in time.'<sup>205</sup> (*CT*, 13E-14E).

### Care

In the previous section, we have already seen the extent to which Heidegger changes the philosophical approach to the problem of time. His next step is to give us a phenomenological description of 'how' Dasein creates time or 'temporalises' itself. Dasein's fundamental structure is that of being-in-the-

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<sup>204</sup> Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the ground of History*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 123.

<sup>205</sup> This extreme possibility refers to the authentic experience of the Dasein's temporality. As we shall see further on, human beings tend to 'misuse' their temporality, they do however have within their existing possibilities the possibility to be authentic.

world; in other words, we always already find ourselves within the world. We do not exist in this world in a theoretical and abstract way; on the contrary, we always find ourselves living with other people with specific actions to undertake, and always engaged with the world. As Heidegger puts it:

Dasein is that entity which is characterized as being-in-the-world...dealing with the world; tarrying alongside it in the manner of performing, effecting and completing, but also contemplating, interrogating, and determining by way of contemplation and comparison...As this being-in-the-world, Dasein is...being-with-one-another, being with Others. (CT, 7E).

Heidegger goes on to analyse further the possible ways we experience our lives. We exist either as one among many other people, (that is, as a typical individual, refusing our uniqueness) or as someone who 'cares' about our very personal lives (as a Dasein which is uniquely concerned with itself). Being 'like everybody else' means being 'nobody'. Such a state is attained often in our everydayness, when we do not take a personal stance towards ourselves. If, however, we decide that our lives really 'matter' to us, then we do 'care' for ourselves.

'Care' in this context refers to the way we choose to experience ourselves. 'Care' is neither a concept nor a convenient way to describe a psychological aspect of our life. Care signifies a specific way of being-in-the-world; it is a specific mode of Dasein. Moreover, Heidegger goes on to make the following fundamental claim: care is the authentic mode of Dasein. This 'authenticity of Dasein is what constitutes its most extreme possibility of Being.' (CT, 10E). What is more and crucially for my purposes, Heidegger defines this 'extreme

possibility of Dasein' as 'time itself'. In other words, Heidegger argues that Dasein as care is time. What, however, does this mean?

We must start with Heidegger's statement that "time is the 'how'." (CT, 22E). To speak of Dasein as time is to speak of Dasein in a specific way; it is to speak of Dasein existing authentically. And such authentic existence is 'care'. We care for ourselves whenever we understand our temporality not in terms of 'now' (the time of clocks, the time of everydayness) but in terms of an engaged, concerned and unique relation to ourselves.

If time is just a series of now, then our past is completely lost for us and our future is cut away from us. If however we decide to understand our existence in this world as something totally ours, if we decide to 'care' for our existence, then suddenly our past, present and future becomes organised around our care. We start making future plans and through them we experience our present differently, at the same time as we re-visit and re-interpret our past. Dasein exists caringly, therefore, when Dasein acquires a past, a present and a future. Temporal Dasein is the Dasein which creates its time, i.e. the Dasein which acquires a past a present and a future that are activated and unified through the existence of our personal future projects.

On the other hand, time as 'now', Dasein as 'everybody' or 'nobody', creates a hiatus within our existence. The past no longer exists, the present is constituted by mere formalities (the time of a clock) and the future is yet to arrive. It is only care, as the 'extreme possibility' of Dasein, that can unify and add significance to our experience of the past, the present and the future. As Jere Paul Surber argues:

Indeed, for Heidegger, the covering over of temporality as the existential horizon of Dasein and the substitution of an indifferent flow of “nows” in its place lies at the very basis of the failure of the western tradition to raise authentically the question of Being.<sup>206</sup>

A series of ‘nows’ do not constitute time; this is merely a convenient way to avoid time.<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, we are drawn now to a further question: how can we really live with care? How can we escape dominant ‘clock-time’? Heidegger’s answer is that only when Dasein is confronted with its own unavoidable temporal ending can it begin to ‘temporalise’ itself.

### **Death**

Dasein operates and exists (simultaneously some times) as a distinct subject or as a part of an inter-subjective community. This is how Heidegger thinks that he can escape the problems that stem from Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s views:

As this being-in-the-world, Dasein is, together with this, being-with-one-another, being with Others: having the same world there with Others, encountering one another, being with one another in the manner of being-for-one-another. (CT, 7E)

As we have already seen, Hegel believes that the whole grounds its members and so only states/nations are considered to be the proper historical subjects, while Kierkegaard claims that ‘states’, ‘nations’ or ‘societies’ are nothing but abstract concepts and thus only individuals possess historical roles. Heidegger argues that Dasein can play different historical roles because

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<sup>206</sup> Jere Paul Surber, ‘Heidegger’s Critique of Hegel’s Notion of Time’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Mar., 1979), p. 360.

<sup>207</sup> Heidegger in *BT*, pp.471-480 gives us a detailed depiction of the philosophical implications of time as a series of ‘nows’.



Dasein can act as a distinct subject or as a member of an inter-subjective community.

But, how can Dasein grasp itself without 'sinking' into being a 'nobody'? Heidegger's answer is that it is only when we are confronted by the definite (but also temporally indefinable) fact of our death (our temporal ending) that we can realise two important things, namely: a) the only thing which is irreplaceable is that we have to die. Our (personal and unique) death cannot be replaced with any other's death;<sup>208</sup> b) the realisation of our temporal end enables us to start interpreting our life as unique and unified. We come to understand our temporality not in terms of 'now' but in terms of a 'destiny'.<sup>209</sup> Dasein exists as time only when Dasein understands the possibility of being in time. Living in a series of 'nows' is no time at all. The notion of destiny here signifies a kind of personal uniqueness, it is the identity of a life lived. We acquire this identity when we manage to escape being 'everybody'.

In other words, Dasein's 'care' is a matter of grasping itself as something unique. It is true that I can understand the whole of my existence as something that I can put under the rubric of 'everybody'. I can choose to see my Dasein as 'everybody's' Dasein. I can never choose, however, to see my death as 'everybody's' death. My death completes my temporal existence not only because it is the end of my temporal existence but most importantly because my death signifies the uniqueness of my temporal existence.

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<sup>208</sup> See Heidegger's analysis in *BT* pp.281-311.

<sup>209</sup> As Wyschogrod puts it: '...the determination to death eliminates all accidental and temporary possibilities and reveals Dasein's destiny, which is the possibility of Dasein's determining itself as possibility.' Michael Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger, The Ontology of Existence*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 110.

Destiny and fate in the Heideggerian universe are the marking points of an existential self-realisation of 'being able'. As we will see, Heidegger uses both of these terms not with the intention to stress out their necessary nature but with the intention to disclose their ability to existentially 'awake' us in the face of our potentialities.

This death (my death) is not constituted by the mere fact that I am a mortal being. My death presents me with the unique possibility of caring to have a unique life which will be completed (and ended) by my unique death. Heidegger's analysis of death is not a psychological or an anthropological one. As Hoffman underlines: 'Death is constant insofar as it is the only pure possibility of Dasein...' <sup>210</sup>

Death is ineluctably interconnected with care:

...If we were not threatened by death, our basic state would not be care; but if our basic state were not care, our death would not be felt as threatening. Care and the sense of one's mortality are thus, to use one of Heidegger's favourite terms, "equiprimordial". <sup>211</sup>

Heidegger directly connects Dasein and time with care and death. Dasein's mode of existence reflects Dasein's possibility of escaping the stillness of time. Dasein has destiny only when Dasein actualises its possibility to care for itself. Temporalisation is Dasein's extreme possibility of grasping itself as a unique temporal existence. Past, present and future are united by the necessary fact of death. However, it is only when we realise that death is to be seen as the crucial beginning of grasping our Dasein as a unique and meaningful Dasein, can death impel us (through care) to start creating a life that belongs to us and only to us.

To conclude this section, there still remains a final philosophical problem about death. Heidegger specifically believes that future is the crucial dimension of Dasein's temporality:

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<sup>210</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, p.201.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p.201.

‘Being futural gives time, cultivates the present and allows the past to be repeated in how it is lived. With regard to time, this means that the fundamental phenomenon of time is the future.’ (CT, 14E).<sup>212</sup>

Dasein’s care is defined as personal engagement with future projects. In this way, death signifies not the end but the beginning of our temporality. Death gives us the opportunity to understand ourselves as beings that can have a destiny. In this way by making future projects, we begin to live differently in the present and continuously reinterpret our past.

But if death can give us identity by ‘completing’ our temporality, then how do we grasp our complete identity? In other words, even if death provides the opportunity to start creating our identity through our actions, we still lack the knowledge of how we are going to live. Life is about change, and death can tell us nothing about such change. The future may well be the crucial factor here, but it must be remembered that the future also leaves us with many different possibilities.<sup>213</sup>

Therefore, Heidegger needs to explore the ‘how’ of this (future) possibility.

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<sup>212</sup> Time’s ‘futurity’, in Heidegger’s philosophy, amounts to the specific role of our ‘life-projects’. We, as temporal beings, need to understand our temporal existence in terms of always making plans for the future. Heidegger arrives at this ‘futurity’ through the existential phenomenon of the uniqueness of our death. In this way, ‘death’, ‘care’, and the ‘future’ are equally decisive elements of our temporal experience. Through the self-realisation of the irreplaceability of our (future) individual/personal death we learn to ‘care’ for our lives by making ‘life-projects’. These projects always refer to the future of our temporality while however giving us the necessary existential point of reference to organise our lives around them.

Writing my PhD thesis refers to my future plan to become an academic, while at the same time helps me to understand my past and my present life in terms of this project. I can thus understand why I was interested in philosophy from the early years of my life and why I studied philosophy but most importantly enables me to interpret my existence in terms of trying to be a philosopher. Heidegger would argue that what made me interested in this project was the fact that I have realised that I had a unique way to be fulfilled as a human being by first realizing that I am a unique existence (because I will have a unique death) and then by interpreting my will as a will to become a philosopher.

<sup>213</sup> As Hoffman puts it: ‘...I cannot grasp just what my complete identity will be.’

## History

Heidegger wrote much on the concept of history. His fundamental point of departure is that if we want to better grasp the problem of Being (ontology), then we begin by understanding the way in which human beings exist. By means of Dasein (as being-in-the-world) the problem of Being is clarified.<sup>214</sup> The question of what is to be a human being is then a preliminary to the question of Being. Ontology begins with Dasein and, of course, Dasein is a temporal (and thus historical) being *per excellence*.<sup>215</sup> To analyse Dasein, therefore, Heidegger must provide a philosophy of history. Such a philosophy of history is required to clarify the ways in which human history can be experienced (rather than providing a definitive statement of 'what' history is). From the outset Heidegger is clear that philosophy is unable to get at 'what' history consists in:

Philosophy will never get to the root of what history is so long as it analyses history as an object of contemplation for method. The enigma of history lies in what it means to be historical.<sup>216</sup> (CT, 20E).

Hence, his approach to history is not an epistemological enquiry, nor is it a phenomenological analysis of what is to be historical. His approach consists in a hermeneutic effort to analyse closely the ways Dasein exists 'temporally':

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<sup>214</sup> See BT, p.424.

<sup>215</sup> Dasein refers only to human beings who exist in this world, they exist thus always in spatio-temporal conditions.

<sup>216</sup> In my opinion, these few lines contain the very heart of the Heideggerian approach to history. Heidegger denies any possibility of acquiring an epistemological view to history. At the same time he directly connects history with 'to be historical', which means that history is considered a procedure ('to be') rather than being a pre-fixed and complete object. What remains is to find out what exactly Heidegger states with the use of the term historical.

Even though many structures of Dasein when taken singly are still obscure, it seems that by casting light upon temporality as the primordial condition for the possibility of care, we have reached the primordial Interpretation of Dasein which we require. (*BT*, 424).

Heidegger carefully refers to 'temporality' instead of time. 'Time' as an objective dimension or a natural 'derivative' of changes is an empty shell. Heidegger concludes his lecture on the concept of time by stating that: 'Dasein is not time but temporality...Time itself is meaningless; time is temporal.' (*CT*, 20E-21E). This 'temporality' is a very specific mode of being-in-the-world and, more specifically, consists in having my own history (my destiny). A Dasein which cares and thus acquires a past, a present, and a future, is a Dasein which 'historicizes' itself; it is a Dasein which has achieved 'an ontological understanding of historicity.' (*BT*, 427). Such historicity is grounded in Dasein's possibility of being temporal. We are able to have and make history because we are (or because we have the possibility of being) temporal beings. Temporality is thus a necessary presupposition of historicity.<sup>217</sup>

In analyzing the historicity of Dasein we shall try to show that this entity is not 'temporal' because 'it stands in history', but that, on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist only because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being. (*BT*, 428).<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> '...what is philosophically primary is neither a theory of the concept-formation of historiography nor the theory of historiographical knowledge, nor yet the theory of history as the Object of historiography; what is primary is rather the Interpretation of authentically historical entities as regards their historicity. (*BT*, 31).

<sup>218</sup> This whole statement is written in italics in the original text which is an indication of its importance to the Heideggerian philosophy in general.

The disclosure of the actual role of history is not simply a matter of having a specific philosophy of history. The philosophical effort to reveal history's role and function is rather the very commencement of Heidegger's philosophy as such and its struggle against traditional ontology.<sup>219</sup>

As David Couzens Hoy argues:

Yet Heidegger's concept of historicity is a crucial part of the structure of Dasein...If Heidegger does indeed eventually occupy a major place in the history of philosophy, this will be due both to his profound concern with the historical nature of human existence and to his rethinking of the history of thought.<sup>220</sup>

Heidegger is eager to present 'destiny' not as a simple concept; instead, it refers to the entire factual context within which Dasein attempts to create its history. Dasein is a 'being-with-others-in-a-world-already given', which means that:

Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny becomes free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein. (*BT*, 436).

'Communication' within a pre-given social background (Dasein's 'generation'), provides the appropriate context for the idea of 'destiny'. We can further

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<sup>219</sup> With the risk of repetition but also with the acknowledgement of its crucial role to Heidegger's philosophical enterprise, we must underline the skeleton of the Heideggerian approach to history: Time does not exist but only as Dasein's temporality. Dasein's temporality produces the necessary precondition for history. Dasein is not simply the individual human being in the world but also 'being –with-one-another (as a community, as a society, as part of common cultural traditions). Its history thus does not refer only to Dasein's personal history but also to Dasein's social, communal and cultural history. History thus in Heidegger's philosophical context constitutes the basic and direct indication of Dasein's authentic existence. That is, history does not simply become an object of knowledge or theoretical contemplation or simply the field of personal adventure, but (history becomes) an ontological and thus necessary function which reveals Dasein's way of existence. Dasein's way of existence reveals (or must reveal) Being.

<sup>220</sup> *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, 1978, p. 329. Hoy in his essay 'History, Historicity and Historiography in Being and Time' pp.329-353 gives a thoroughly analysis of the Heideggerian approach to history.

understand the social and communal dimension of Dasein's destiny (and thus, Dasein's temporality, and thus, Dasein's history) through an examination of the role of 'fate':

Fate is that powerless superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversities...As such, fate requires as the ontological condition for its possibility, the state of Being in care—that is to say, temporality. (*BT*, 436-437).

An initial conclusion to be drawn from the above is that 'fate' is grounded on 'care'. That is, Dasein has to face this 'fate', a 'powerless superior power'. This almost looks like a contradiction: either something is a superior power or it is powerless. In addition, fate requires care, which means that fate cannot (ontologically) be superior to care.

The way out of this paradox is by means of a complete elaboration of the role of 'destiny' in Heidegger's analysis. Destiny is both a personal and a communal destiny. Dasein finds itself living in a pre-given world and in a pre-given society and fate is a matter of this pre-existent social background.<sup>221</sup>

Fate is, therefore, a superior power because it functions as a pre-given social milieu for Dasein, but it is at the same time powerless because Dasein must choose how it is to utilise this inheritance. History is not strictly a matter of individuals, but rather choices (however they are made). History happens whenever: 'Dasein temporalizes itself in the way the future and having been are united in the Present.' (*BT*, 449).

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<sup>221</sup> As Wyschogrod argues: 'What Dasein determines...consists of a taking over of the heritage into which it finds itself thrown.' Michael Wyschogrod, p. 110. My disagreement with Wyschogrod refers to the definition of this 'heritage'. While Wyschogrod stays in the specific role of this 'heritage as a context for every individual human being, I argue that this 'heritage' is always an ontological pre-given historical possibility referring to our ability to understand our Dasein in terms of a particular historical tradition.

Dasein is only able to historicise in a 'moment of vision', in 'resolute repetition'. The moment of vision is Dasein's choice to project itself towards its future projects while (resolutely) repeating its past. In this way, Dasein's present stops being a series of empty 'nows' and becomes the center of its current existence. Resolute repetition is Dasein's ongoing re-evaluation of its past in the light of its future projects.

History thus, becomes the unified and dynamic expression of Dasein's authentic existence. Dasein is forever able to explore, in infinite ways, its past, at the same time as it is urged onward by its future projects. History becomes a 'recurrence of the possible':

But when historicity is authentic, it understands history as the 'recurrence' of the possible, and knows that a possibility will recur only if existence is open for it fatefully, in a moment of vision, in resolute repetition. (*BT*, 444).

Heidegger thus completes his analysis of history by pointing out the need for a complete shift away from understanding history as a given object to understanding history as a field which incorporates infinite ways (for Dasein) of interpreting the past, while focusing on the future. Historical truth in this context is not something fixed or absolute, it is Dasein's destiny.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> That can raise suspicions of a Hegelian approach to history. We will examine closer these suspicions when we will refer to the relation of Heidegger to Hegel. J. L. Mehta makes an interesting remark on this: 'Historically, the light of truth has taken possession of the Western mind in various forms from one epoch to another... Truth is therefore not only history but destiny (*Geschick*), in the sense that, from epoch to epoch, man finds himself thrown into and in the grip of the particular form in which truth prevails in a particular epoch, so that all his thinking and doing, the ways things show themselves to him, the way he comports himself towards them and what and how he thinks about them, the way he is in the world, is determined by the particular epochal light of truth in which he happens to live. But this dependence of man is not an onesided determination of man by the concealing-revealing light of Truth. Truth, as determinative of man's existence, needs being tended and cherished by man in order to prevail as truth.' J. L. Mehta, *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), p. 232.



## Part II

### Heidegger and Hegel

Heidegger and Hegel share a common philosophical belief, namely that history and our understanding of its nature play a crucial part in our philosophical interpretation of the World and, especially, in our approach to the nature and the meaning of man. Hegel, however, stresses history's role as an epistemological object while Heidegger considers history an ontological indication of Dasein's temporality.

In my exposition of their complex philosophical relation I analyse their philosophical approaches to three determinate historical problems: a) the problem of 'historical relativity', b) the problem of time and c) the problem of the relation between subject and object.<sup>223</sup>

#### Historical relativity

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Truth thus, refers to Heidegger's 'fate' and is Dasein's choice (destiny) to embrace this or that part of this 'epochal' truth. Dasein must energetically 'cherish' this truth and make it its truth. We can thus have here a possible exposition of Heidegger's approach to truth. Truth is not something absolute but is always a possibility within a certain historical period. So far it looks as if this 'truth' belongs to Hegel's philosophy. This cannot be the case however, because for Heidegger, Dasein has the freedom (and the duty) to personally choose and 'endorse' a particular possibility of the truth between many others that are present (as possibilities) in any given historical era. In this way while Heidegger escapes any 'absolute' truth, he manages also to make Dasein the crucial factor of the 'truth'. It still remains the problem of how Heidegger is going to escape historical relativism. More about this on the very next part of this chapter.

<sup>223</sup> Historical relativity refers not only to the nature of truth (if we must understand 'truth' not as an eternal and absolute entity or essence or simply as a certain historical product) but also (and mainly) refers to which degree history and historical circumstances can create man or the other way around. The question of the exact relation of man to his history constitutes the basic concern for both Hegel and Heidegger.

The nature of time for Heidegger is the axis of his argumentative approach to history and time thus represents a key point to his philosophy. Hegel on the other hand allocates the problem of time to his analysis of Nature. One very natural objection then would be that the concept of time is not an important aspect of the relation of Heidegger to Hegel because Hegel puts time in a different context from Heidegger. Heidegger nevertheless states clearly that we need to compare his idea of temporality with Hegel's conception of time (*BT*, 480).

The subject-object antinomy holds a crucial place both in Hegel's and Heidegger's philosophy. While this antinomy does not concern solely history, if we want to acquire a deeper understanding of their philosophical attitudes, and even more, if we aspire to fully grasp their overall philosophical relation, we must completely understand their answer to this particular problem.

For Hegel, a man cannot escape the limits of the historical period within which he lives. Hegel thus considers man's approach to truth as a historically confined effort. Man will understand as much as his historical period will allow him to understand. A necessary philosophical implication of this approach is that individuals in different historical periods possess different truths (or different versions of it). In order for man to know the whole truth he must look backwards to his past and after that he must understand his limitations without trying to arrive at any 'absolute' truth. Hegel makes history a crucial and objective factor of what is truth.<sup>224</sup>

Heidegger, on the other hand, is not looking for truth as 'what' but as 'how', which from the outset makes his approach different to Hegel's. Heidegger, however, considers Dasein's history to be directly related to destiny and fate. A human being, cannot but look in the given historical background to search for possible ways of being in truth. This means that Heidegger also establishes historical limits to Dasein's enquiry after truth.

Heidegger's response, however, is that Dasein has infinite ways of interpreting its historical background and thus Dasein cannot be fully subjected to its historical era.<sup>225</sup> 'Dasein is historical' means not that truth is a matter of historical relativity; rather, it means that truth is grounded in Dasein's temporality. Dasein is permanently on its way of becoming authentic.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Hegel thinks that absolute truth in history is possible. He claims that this truth is Spirit's self-realisation through reason which concludes that 'man is free'. Human beings, however, lack the capacity to go beyond their historical period. Hence, history limits subjective historical knowledge, while history provides the objective (and ultimate) historical aim.

<sup>225</sup> As Michael Allen Gillespie also points out regarding this: 'While man is thus crucially dependent upon Being as fate or destiny, he is not subject to historical necessity, and there is no historical limit upon human possibilities.' Michael Allen Gillespie, 1984, p. 169.

<sup>226</sup> This does not mean that we cannot arrive at a secure true knowledge of a historical fact. But this is not what Heidegger defines as truth. This is simply a matter of 'what happened'.

The most important philosophical difference between Hegel and Heidegger is that the first considers history to shape man while the latter considers history to be a limitless reservoir of Dasein's possible hermeneutical interpretations. For Hegel, therefore, history is an objective necessity while for Heidegger, history is an ontological consequence. History for Hegel dominates man, history for Heidegger functions as a personal liberation towards authenticity. Nevertheless, in consequence, Heidegger's hermeneutics are always vulnerable to relativism and thus charges of historical relativism.

If man's truth consists in hermeneutical freedom, then what we gain in freedom we lose in certainty.<sup>227</sup>

### Time

Heidegger argues that the problem of time is indicative of the inefficiency of the traditional manner by which philosophers attempt to disclose Being. That is, for Heidegger Being has never (until his philosophy) been understood correctly.<sup>228</sup>

Hegel on the other hand examines the problem of the nature of time in his *The Philosophy of Nature*.<sup>229</sup> This indicates that time for Hegel is to be treated as a natural phenomenon. He does also refer to time in the *Phenomenology of*

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<sup>227</sup> See also the three concluding pages in Hoy's essay. *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, 1978, pp. 350-353.

<sup>228</sup> 'Indeed for Heidegger, the covering over of temporality as the existential horizon of Dasein and the substitution of an indifferent flow of 'nows' in its place lies at the very basis of the failure of the western tradition to raise authentically the question of Being.' Jere Paul Surber, 'Heidegger's Critique of Hegel's Notion of Time', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Mar., 1979), p. 360.

<sup>229</sup> 'Philosophy of Nature' forms the second part of Hegel's 'Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences', with 'Science of Logic' being the first part and 'The Philosophy of Spirit' being the third part. G.W.F Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: being Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, translated from Nicolin and Paggeler's edition (1959) and from the *Zusatze in Michelet's text (1847)* by A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

*Spirit* (in 'Sense-Certainty' in particular), suggesting that time in Hegel's system is something more than a simple natural dimension.<sup>230</sup>

The basic difference between Hegel and Heidegger's theories of time is that the former embeds it in a philosophical system subservient to speculative thought, whereas the latter establishes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to time. In this context Hegel is obliged to analyse time along with space, but Heidegger provides a phenomenological analysis of how time functions within Dasein's existence.

Hegel thus relates time to history only because time provides Spirit with a field for self-understanding. Heidegger, on the other hand, accuses Hegel (along with the whole Western philosophical tradition) of failing to understand that time cannot be approached as a natural phenomenon apart from Dasein's activities.

All they share regarding time is their common belief that the so-called 'bad infinite' (an endless succession of moments) cannot be the basis for a complete understanding of experience.<sup>231</sup>

The question, therefore, is not whether Hegel or Heidegger is right but which conception of time provides a more profound grasp on history.<sup>232</sup> For Hegel,

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<sup>230</sup> 'Sense-Certainty' along with other modes of historical consciousness places time in a direct connection with history. See: Jere Paul Surber, 1979, p. 370.

<sup>231</sup> Surber, 1979, p.375: '...Hegel and Heidegger agree on at least one crucial issue: the demand that the "bad infinite" of a mathematical-like succession be overcome as the basis for the way in which experience is understood.'

<sup>232</sup> To be fair to both of them, Hegel approaches time as a natural phenomenon which provides the necessary ontological field for history and the historical and Heidegger regards time to be a necessary product of human's 'temporality'. Time thus in their philosophies amounts to different ontological roles, i.e. for Hegel time is above everything else a natural and universal phenomenon and for Heidegger time is directly related to human existence. Having said that, we need to fully capture time's historical importance in their respective interpretations. Hegel disconnects time from human ontology while Heidegger makes time a direct outcome of human ontology. Time thus in Hegel's approach is firstly a measurable quantity while time in Heidegger's approach is an indefinitely immeasurable quality of human ontology. Time and history thus in Hegel amount to specific quantities while time and history for Heidegger amount to qualities always open to different interpretations.

time relates to history only as long as history is regarded as a field for human contemplation. Heidegger's approach to temporality ignores (and even 'scorns') such an abstract approach to time. Temporality functions as the very basis, the necessary ontological ground of history. In this way time stops being an object and starts being a structure of Dasein's historicity (Dasein's temporalisation).

The problem with Hegel's notion of time is that it withdraws time from human activity: Spirit is that which unfolds 'in time', people simply exist within it. Hegelian time exists within a supra-human dimension. On the other hand, the problem with Heideggerian temporality is that it leaves us with no specific indications of how to ultimately understand the relation between temporality and Being.<sup>233</sup> This means that while Heidegger is able to provide an alternative philosophical point of view, he is unable to proceed further than that.<sup>234</sup>

### Subject-Object

Hegel argues that the only way to overcome the hiatus between subject and object is his 'absolute method'. This method consists in an active unification of the subject and its object. His philosophy, however, still reflects a subjective

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<sup>233</sup> Of course, that's because *Being and Time* was left unfinished; a late essay like 'On Time and Being' is meant to give such indications. Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, translated by Joan Stambauch, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1-54.

<sup>234</sup> Heidegger never gave us even the way in which Dasein's temporality leads us to Being. All we have is *Being and Time*, which examines Dasein in terms of temporality. He left us with the 'anticipation' of temporality. See for example the definition of temporality as Ernest Daniel Carrere understands it: 'this distinctive quality of anticipatory resoluteness, of Dasein's authentic Being, Heidegger calls "temporality". Only as temporality is one authentically "there", embracing the *having been* of thrownness into *futural* death through the moment of vision—or insight—of the authentic present.' (The italics belong to the text.) Ernest Daniel Carrere, *Creating a Human World*, (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), p. 53.

The problem is that history cannot only be approached through anticipation; history must be experienced. Heidegger can give us a different point of view, but is that enough? This question must be answered by every single thinker of history and is a very difficult one. Heidegger again could answer back to us that it never was his intention to give us answers...

stance, at least according to Heidegger.<sup>235</sup> Heidegger, on the other hand, regards the 'subject-object' condition as an obstacle which conceals instead of revealing Being.<sup>236</sup>

Historical agents for Hegel are the 'great individuals', but even they have to obey the deeper force of Spirit's self-realisation. Spirit thus is the only actual historical subject. Its object is its own self-consciousness. In this way, Hegel believes to have shown how within history the subject incorporates its object. Human beings remain mere puppets in this process; Spirit moves their strings. While Heidegger provides an analysis of what he believes to be the real function of historical agency, and while he does give back to human beings (as authentic Dasein) their historical role, he still opens the door to a possible fragmentation of the historical subject.<sup>237</sup>

One possible philosophical advantage of Heidegger's approach to history is that it enables Dasein's past to be continuously activated. Whenever Dasein makes a future plan, it must re-evaluate its past in order to recover from its

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<sup>235</sup> No matter what Hegel believes, 'Spirit' is an 'absolute' Subject rather than being an 'absolute' Object.

<sup>236</sup> For Heidegger the subject-object antinomy is a direct philosophical product of the 'obsession' of western philosophy with knowledge. He regards epistemology as a wrong way to approach Being. Heidegger, instead of creating knowing subjects, tries to prove the dead ends of them. As Stephen Mulhall points out: '...Dasein can truly question the meaning of Being only by recognizing that none of its time-hallowed ontological categories are self-evidently necessary...' Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 210.

<sup>237</sup> Heidegger's persistence at situations rather than subjects leaves us open to fragmentation. If all we have is our activities and if only through these activities we can have a possible indication of our agency, then we lose from our sight a steady point of reference. Heidegger speaks of 'being authentic' instead of 'I'. He maybe escapes the problems that come along with it but he nevertheless cannot secure our unity. This is the reason why Berel Lang argues that: '...the individual self then appears as a series of contingent and dissociated moments of agency, divided so sharply that efforts at reconstruction must also be transparently partial and fragmentary. Connections discovered among such moments must then be either imposed externally or devised by the subject—in any event, created out of whole cloth and excluding any intrinsic or conceptual link between the theoretical and the practical.' Berel Lang, *Heidegger's Silence*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 84.

past hidden hermeneutical possibilities. Hegel, on the other hand, confines man's past to an object for the human contemplation.<sup>238</sup>

In conclusion, Hegel and Heidegger, while representing different ways of 'doing philosophy', both share much in their theories of history. History, for both of them, constitutes a vital and central dimension of man's ultimate reality.<sup>239</sup> Their most important difference is that Hegel understands history as an object for reflection, while Heidegger makes history the ontological basis for man.<sup>240</sup>

### Heidegger and Kierkegaard

My aim here is not to present a full analysis of the possible relations of Heidegger's philosophy to Kierkegaard's thought.<sup>241</sup> My purpose here is to briefly present a comparison of their approaches to history.

Heidegger 'condescends' to refer to Kierkegaard in only three footnotes of *Being and Time* and even in these footnotes his tone is rather negative.<sup>242</sup> 'There is more to be learned philosophically from his 'edifying' writings than

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<sup>238</sup> David Couzens Hoy in its 'The Owl and the Poet: Heidegger's Critique of Hegel', *boundary 2*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Martin Heidegger and Literature (Winter, 1976), pp. 395-396, argues that: 'The past, however, includes human beings, and individuals cannot treat their pasts (or the pasts of others) in that way. The meaning of the past can still change with present or future actions. Thus, Heidegger can even say that the past (as *Gewesenheit*) is still operant in the present, and indeed, even "arises from the future".'

<sup>239</sup> 'Heidegger himself indicates parallels between his own thought and Hegel's. In fact, he translates dialectical terms from the *Phenomenology* into terms used in *Being and Time*.' Ibid. p. 405. Dasein is human existence in spatio-temporality and thus Dasein always is an existing (historical/temporal) human being.

<sup>240</sup> Hegel can guarantee us that history can be seen as something utterly comprehensible and Heidegger can open for us a way to live history as an active force of our lives. The only problem is that a possible 'reconciliation' between these two approaches to history is blocked by Heidegger's refusal to acknowledge history as an object and by Hegel's rejection of human beings as primary historical agents.

<sup>241</sup> This would require a whole new thesis, not only a part of a chapter.

<sup>242</sup> *BT*, p. 492 (footnote four to H. 190), p. 494 (footnote six to H. 235) and p. 497 (footnote three to H. 338).

For an excellent analysis of Heidegger's 'debt' to Kierkegaard see: *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern. New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), chapter six: 'Existence, Anxiety and the Moment of Vision: Fundamental Ontology and Existentiell Faith Revisited' by George Pattison, pp. 128-151.

from his theoretical ones...' (*BT*, 494, footnote six to H. 235). Heidegger seems, therefore, to neglect any positive Kierkegaardian contribution not only to his thought but also to philosophy in general.

Kierkegaard certainly never built a system nor did he write in a 'philosophical-scholarly' manner, but nevertheless he managed to shape almost every single concept Heidegger uses in *BT*. 'Existence', 'repetition', 'anxiety', 'idle talk', 'the one', 'guilt', 'the moment of vision', even 'confrontation with death', are concepts, topics and ideas that Kierkegaard first coined, in his effort to establish an alternative to 'official', systematic philosophy.

There is one basic difference between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, namely: Kierkegaard grounds the human self in God whereas Heidegger grounds (authentic) Dasein in temporality and ultimately in Being.<sup>243</sup> Kierkegaard thus considers God the ultimate ground of the (authentic) human historical self. This means that authentic human historical existence needs God to become authentic. A supra-historical entity appears here to ground man's historical existence. Heidegger, however, ultimately fails to present us with the specific way in which Dasein grounds itself in Being. Heidegger, therefore, falls far short of establishing and proving what is the ground of human historical existence.

When it comes to the question of grounding history, Kierkegaard and Heidegger resort to either a paradoxical supra-entity (God) or to an

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<sup>243</sup> See for example: Harrison Hall, 'Love and Death: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on authentic and inauthentic human existence', *Inquiry*, 27:1-4, p. 194: 'Heidegger's version of existentialism is at most agnostic, whereas Kierkegaard's is clearly Christian (albeit a very unorthodox version of Christianity).' Hall concludes his article by stating that Heidegger owes his notion of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' on Kierkegaard. *Ibid*, p. 196.



indefinable and ultimately 'fuzzy' Being. The latter is certainly no better than the former.

In order to bring this out further, I want to compare Kierkegaard and Heidegger further in relation to two points, namely: a) time and b) the nature of the human historical agency.<sup>244</sup>

### **Time**

Heidegger recognises the significance of Kierkegaard's concept of the 'moment of vision'. According to Heidegger, however, Kierkegaard singularly failed to overcome the Aristotelian and the Hegelian interpretations of time. (*BT*, 497, footnote three to H. 338).

Kierkegaard defines the 'moment of vision' as the specific moment in which a man decides to make a choice. In this way, the moment of vision enables man to be responsible for his self-creation and thus, the moment of vision 'breaks' time as a series of 'nows' such that it succeeds in giving time its future. The moment of vision in the Kierkegaardian context is, therefore, the cause of the actual existence within man's life of his past, his present and his future. More than this, the moment of vision directs man's historical time (temporality) towards the future.

Man's history is, therefore, no longer a series of nows. Man's history becomes a form of active unification, that is, man is now a historical agent. In this way, the moment of vision originates the human historical agent. We cannot be the makers of our history without deciding responsibly about our future.

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<sup>244</sup> The definition of time and its role to human history is central in both approaches to history. Kierkegaard defines time in a way that enables him to define history as human responsible choice towards future and Heidegger comes with the notion of temporality as the very ground of (human) history.

The role of humans within history is the most vital conception for both of them. Kierkegaard along with Heidegger declares that history is only man's history. The way thus they create human historical self is of the greatest importance for both approaches to history.

Heidegger speaks of 'care' and the 'ecstatic moment', and what is more, he still speaks of man who decides to take his life in his own hands. Heidegger is right to point out that Kierkegaard never systematically attacks the Aristotelian conception of time, but what he fails to mention is that Kierkegaard does not need to. Heidegger makes his own conception of time the very heart of his philosophy, but this is not to deny that Kierkegaard acknowledges the importance of the individual moment of decision as the most crucial part of having history. Hence, Kierkegaard also renders the understanding of the 'moment' (time) the very heart of understanding history.

Their only difference is that Heidegger makes temporality the very ground of Dasein, while Kierkegaard regards God as the ultimate ground. Although someone might argue (and Heidegger certainly does so argue) that it is only this move which is of philosophical importance, it still needs to be reaffirmed that, despite this difference, the moment of vision (a key aspect of both theories of time) is defined identically in Kierkegaard and in Heidegger. Hence when Heidegger accuses Kierkegaard of not making explicit the 'existential' importance of temporality (as the very ground of Dasein) and remaining bound to the 'existentiell phenomenon of the moment of the vision' (*BT*, 497), what he forgets is that he (Heidegger) never provides an exact definition of the difference between 'existentiell' and 'existential'.<sup>245</sup>

In conclusion, Heidegger attacks of the idea that time exists as a series of nows, while Kierkegaard too undermines it through his definition of the moment of vision. Their only difference consists in the fact that Heidegger uses this moment as the ontological basis of Dasein's temporality, whereas

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<sup>245</sup> For this point see Pattison, especially the section: 'The Existentiell, the Existential, and the Question of Method' from *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern*, pp. 132-141.

Kierkegaard is more interested in pointing out the responsibility involved in making decisions.

### **Historical agency**

The importance of both Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's theories of history is that both of them make man the sole historical agent. Only human beings qua human beings are historical beings. Kierkegaard speaks of human consciousness and human decision along with human responsibility. Heidegger speaks of Dasein's temporality along with care and destiny. Both of them recognise the objective historical importance of pre-given social, cultural and natural conditions. Kierkegaard speaks of necessity and Heidegger of fate and destiny.

And yet Heidegger does not confine individual human existence (Dasein) to the limits of personal decision, and this is because he recognises Dasein as a social being. Being-with-one-another is an important mode of Dasein. Kierkegaard, however, seems to confine historical agency to the interior world of individual consciousness. Nevertheless (as we have seen), such an opposition is facile, since in *Two Ages* Kierkegaard does describe the social dimensions of individuality. Both Heidegger and Kierkegaard point out the danger of losing ourselves in the crowd and the need for personal struggle to acquire an original and authentic self.

What makes Heidegger's approach more effective, however, is that he provides a definite theoretical structure that gives Dasein a firmer relation to history. While Kierkegaard remains rooted to a discourse of 'taking decisions about my future', Heidegger is able to assign Dasein the role of the 'interpreter' of history, and through this, the role of the only being who can

give meaning not only to the present and future but also to the past. Heidegger's Dasein through continuously re-approaching the past renders it permanently active and alive. Heidegger hermeneutics thus, enrich man's historical agency.

### **Part III**

#### **Conclusion**

Heidegger's importance is evident. What matters here, however, is the question of whether we can still use his thought for a philosophy of history. In other words, is Heidegger's contribution to a philosophy of history more important than Kierkegaard's? It is certainly true that Heidegger, at the very least, gives us a new perspective on historical reality. History suddenly becomes an infinite field of possibilities. These possibilities do not refer merely to our future but also to our past. Hermeneutics in Heidegger's thought acquire the force of an everlasting question. In this way history can never come to an end. Dasein will always have the possibility to re-interpret and thus re-invent itself.

The most intractable problem, however, is the very fact that history cannot come to a conclusion. The question of history must remain an enigma. What, then, of the moral and practical implications of history? Heidegger never provides any kind of moral or political point of reference. The consolation Heidegger gives is that of having the possibility to become authentic Daseins. Such authenticity is, however, amoral.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Every single criminal who decides to be something unique and opposed to the mass, and who do care about his criminal activities, is an authentic Dasein. Hitler thus, is an authentic Dasein. Gillespie points out this when he searches for Heidegger's possible answer to the question 'what is the history':

In consequence, history for Heidegger is in grave danger of falling into the dark abyss of obscurity. Even if we choose to approach history as an enigma we need to believe that we do have the possibility of finding (someday) the correct answer. With Heidegger's approach to history we cannot even hope for any answer, even a wrong one. All interpretations are equally plausible as long as they allow human beings to actualise and realise their (existential) 'uniqueness'.

Heidegger believes that history is Dasein's ultimate ontological field and the historical is Dasein's ultimate product. Dasein, however, remains an eternal question. Authentic Dasein establishes history without concern for morality. The history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has proven how dangerous this can be.

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'History for Heidegger is fundamentally bound up with Being, which is a question. The answer to our question [What is history?] is thus itself a question. Heidegger's examination indicates that our question itself may be wholly inappropriate and in fact positively misleading. Heidegger, however, thereby redirects our questioning toward a realm that is today unexplored. The consequences of this redirection of the question of the history for human life and politics have scarcely been perceived and certainly have not been adequately comprehended.' Michael Allen Gillespie, 1984, p. 164.

Also: 'Heidegger almost entirely neglects the consideration of actual history and historical causes without ever explaining why they are unimportant or how they derive from the prevailing revelation of Being.' Ibid, 171.

Gillespie of course is mainly interested in underlining the possible political implications of Heidegger's philosophy while I am here mainly underlining the possible moral implications. My only problem with Gillespie's interpretation is that he fails to see that morality is the necessary basis for any political behaviour or any political theory.

## Conclusion

What is the nature of history remains a question that is open to debate among historians and philosophers of history. It seems, however, that this ongoing debate is mainly focused on the possible ways we can either know or understand or interpret something which already took place.<sup>247</sup> History, then, appears to be orientated either towards knowledge of the past or interpretation of the past in the present. Hence, as I will show in the next paragraphs, history as a future to be responsibly chosen by an ethical subject is totally absent from this debate.

Take, for example, the contemporary philosopher of history, Martin Stuart-Fox: when he summarises the current debate on the nature of history, he does not even mention future ethical choices as a possible answer to the question of 'what is the nature of history':

The nature of history and its relationship to science on the one hand and literature on the other seems to hold perennial fascination for philosophers of history and historians who reflect upon their discipline...Much of the debate has centred on the possibility of arriving at some kind of historical truth, denied by the most radical postmodernists (Jenkins 1991), but claimed to some degree at least by most other historians.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> In my introduction I have demonstrated the main current theories concerning this debate.

<sup>248</sup> Martin Stuart-Fox, 'Two views of the history of historiography and the nature of history', *History Australia*, 4 (2), 2007, pp. 44.1- 44.17.

I quote this article because here we can find a summary of the whole analysis of the current debate among historians and philosophers of history. Stuart-Fox summarises the arguments of every participant and thus helps us capture the nature of the whole debate.

For a thorough analysis of the current problems concerning the nature of history (and some possible answers) see also: Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History Knowledge, Evidence, Language*, (Chicago: Lyceum Books Inc., 2001).

I have argued that Kierkegaard's approach to history is: a) an original and important contribution to philosophy of history and b) beneficiary and significant for the contemporary practice of philosophy of history.

Kierkegaard gives us a new perspective on what the nature of history is. He can do so, because he redirects focus from knowledge of the past towards the responsible creation of the future. Kierkegaard argues that what matters in history is not an abstract and disinterested knowledge of 'what happened' but 'to be infinitely interested in existing':

The demand of abstraction upon him is that he becomes disinterested in order to obtain something to know; the requirement of the ethical upon him is to be infinitely interested in existing. (*CUP*, 316).

The contemporary practice of philosophy of history can benefit from Kierkegaard's arguments concerning the nature of history in two ways: a) by considering history as a future choice, that is, to recognise that history is not only the possibility to know or to interpret the past but to also consider that history can be an individual ethical choice creating the future history and b) by taking under consideration Kierkegaard's arguments regarding the structure of the historical subject, that is, to incorporate in the current debate the Kierkegaardian claim about the absolute interconnection between human conscious choices and the historical subject.

Philosophy of history then: a) can be enriched by incorporating future ethical decisions. Future will be a crucial part of history enabling historians and philosophers of history to better comprehend history. And b) contemporary philosophy of history will be able to approach the problem of historical agency

from a different perspective than the current one. Kierkegaard's argumentation concerning the indecomposable unity of human consciousness and historical reality will open new 'windows' and will bring forth new perspectives regarding the relation of historical agents and the creation of history.

Hegel<sup>249</sup> approaches history with the expressed intention to decipher the hidden meaning of the past. He claims that we can know history as the field in which necessity (of reason) rules. He denies to individual human beings any historical significance and he contends that only the organised social communities, such as nations or states, can play an important role in the making of history.

Heidegger argues that temporality is the very ground of Dasein and, thus, history can always be re-interpreted; that is, history for Heidegger cannot be approached by any 'objective' method which would aim at obtaining secure and conclusive knowledge of what happened.

As Stuart-Fox states, with respect to the current debate surrounding the nature of history, history can be understood either as an epistemological effort to acquire true knowledge or as an interpretative effort to analyse past history from the standpoint of the present. Hegel represents the former approach to history and Heidegger represents the latter. Kierkegaard, however, provides us with an alternative: on the one hand, he speaks of history as a future ethical choice and, on the other, he interweaves history and the human subject in such a way that to become a human subject is to create history and to have a history is to acquire a self through personal choices.

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<sup>249</sup> I have already demonstrated why I chose Hegel and Heidegger as Kierkegaard's interlocutors concerning the nature of history.



Kierkegaard's contribution to the philosophy of history then, consists of his philosophical effort to point out: a) the futurity of history and b) the way in which history and the becoming a human self are totally dependent on each other.

Yet, this is not to choose Kierkegaard, rather than Hegel – or the future instead of the past. Both must be taken into account in a comprehensive philosophy of history. Hence, in this thesis I have argued in favour of a 'synthesis' of Hegel's approach to history and Kierkegaard's one. This is because I claim that it is only in this way that we can acquire a fuller and more accurate picture of what history is. I contend that, if we choose to do otherwise, we are in the danger of losing from view crucial elements of history. Hegel and his epistemological and ontological claims neglect the historical importance of the individual human being. Kierkegaard does not make room for the historical importance of the social character of our subjectivity; that is, for Kierkegaard, what make us complete human subjects is only our personal choice; he does not acknowledge the significance of our social 'inter-subjectivity'.

My synthesis aims to do justice to both Hegel and Kierkegaard; that is, to take advantage of their arguments in a way that does not simply oppose the one to the other. Rather, I have complemented one's view with that of the other, arriving at a fuller view of history.

I have also argued that Heidegger's approach to history is derived from the Kierkegaardian concept of history. That is, Heidegger is prone to 'borrow' many of Kierkegaard's basic terms (such as 'the moment'). And yet, on the one hand, Heidegger's approach does not provide any specific definition as to

what the nature of history is and, on the other, Heidegger's 'amoral' approach to history endangers moral concerns surrounding the march of history.

It is then, Kierkegaard's 'existential' approach to history which provides a decisive supplement to the philosophy of history – a crucial addition to historical knowledge. That is, the Kierkegaardian concept of history foregrounds ethical, individual human existence, which: a) lives in the present, b) is engaged with the past, and, most importantly, c) plans the future. Kierkegaard denies the absolute certainty of historical knowledge in order to affirm the 'wholeness' of the individual historical existence:

Every subject is an existing subject, and therefore this must be essentially expressed in all of his knowing and must be expressed by keeping his knowledge from an illusory termination in sensate certainty, in historical knowledge, in illusory results. In historical knowledge, he comes to know much about the world, nothing about himself...Nothing historical can become infinitely certain to me except this: that I exist. (*CUP*, 81).

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